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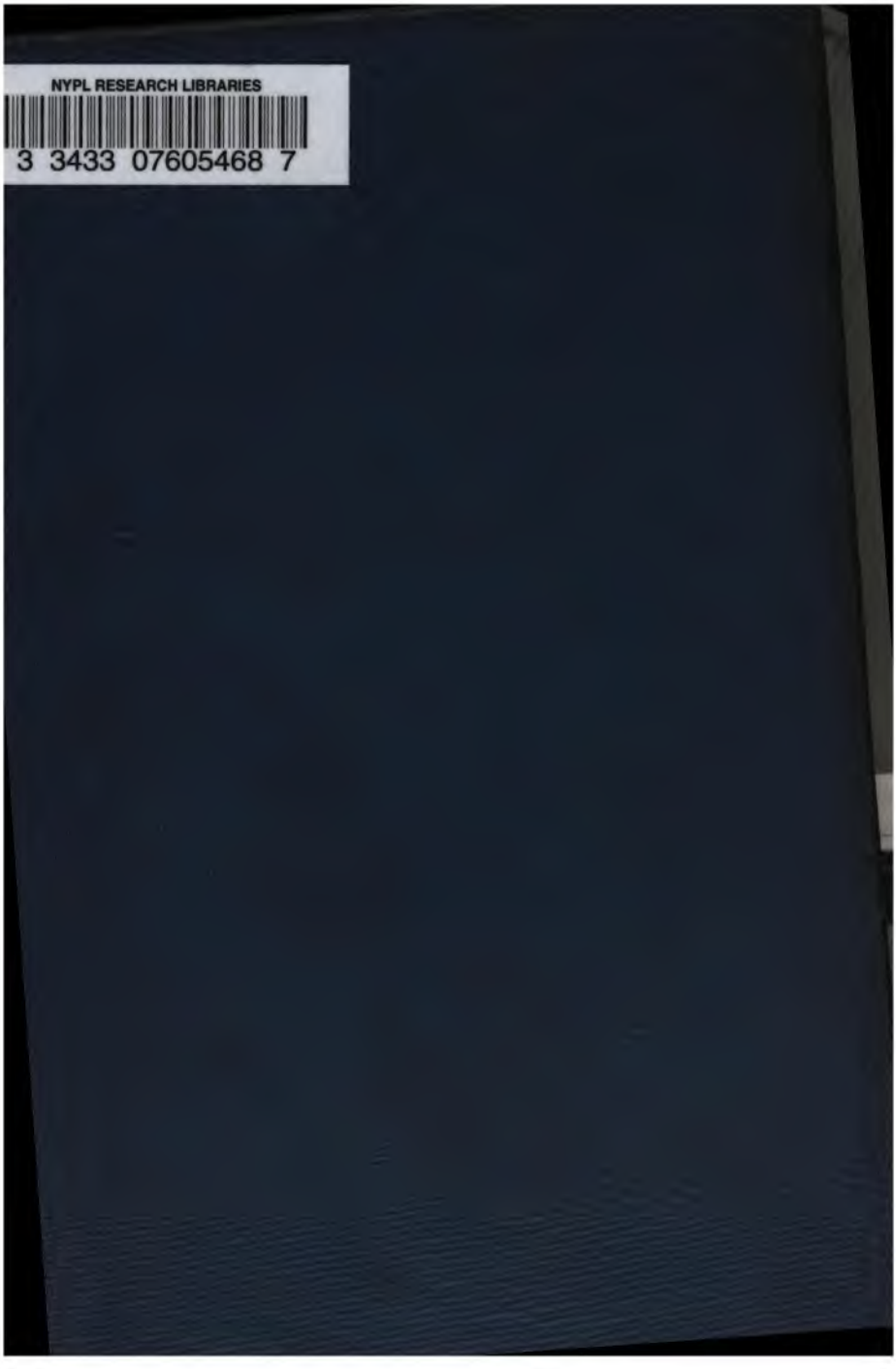
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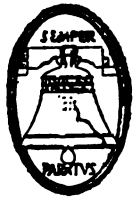

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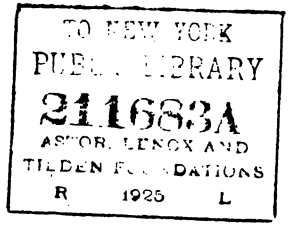

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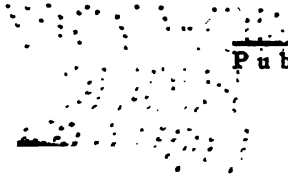

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McCARTY INCOG.

CHAPTER I

THE WRECK

"THERE'S a storm brewing, Mac. I don't like the brassy look to the sky, I'm telling you, and I misdoubt that this old tub will get us to that Matta—whatever its heathen name is—before the devil and all breaks loose!" The lanky figure in oil-skins straightened beside the pounding motor of the weather-beaten dory and glanced wistfully back at the shore line of Cape Cod.

"Mattagansett? I'm surprised at you, Denny, that's chauffeured a fire engine these last two years through the heaviest traffic in the world, to be leery of this bit of a boat when you've the whole sea to yourself." Ex-Roundsman Timothy McCarty, far from his urban haunts, chewed contentedly on the unlighted cigar which protruded from beneath his close-cropped, sandy mustache and eased back in his narrow seat. "The water is more smooth than when we left Plimptonport."

"Too smooth, like there'd been oil poured on it!" Dennis Riordan retorted. "There's a hush to the air too, if you'll notice, as though it was waiting for something to

drop. I've gone trout-fishing with you, though to stand all day with my feet in the water and black flies eating me alive for the sake of a couple of fresh sardines was not my idea of a vacation; but the next time I get a month's sick leave you'll not be cajoling me to the back of beyond for any more of this deep-sea stuff! Sick leave, did the Board call it? Leave to get sick, they should have said! I've a gone feeling coming on me now——"

"'Tis in your head, then, and there's not much missing." McCarty cast a complacently uncritical eye at the luridly glowing horizon. "That jolt you got when you hit the elevated pillar must have done more damage than the doctor claimed, for you've been a soured man since and there's no pleasing you. Didn't I give up my peaceful, quiet life——?"

"You did!" interrupted the other with bitterness. "If it's soured I am, I must be getting old like you!"

"Old, is it?" McCarty stared. "I can take on my weight any day with the best of them!"

"In fact, maybe, but not in spirit any more." The homely, lantern-jawed face set resolutely. "'Tis that that has me worried this last month or so, Mac. You've been leading a peaceful, quiet life all right but it's not like you, letting your tenants put it over on you and paying that robber tailor's bill without a kick! Are you going into politics that you're afraid to lose votes by opening the mouth on you? What is it?"

"Nothing whatever." The Ex-Roundsman clamped down on his cigar. "I'm tired of fighting the tenants over a busted boiler or a tile off the roof, and the tailor's

bill wasn't worth bothering about. You've something more on your mind than that."

He stated it as a fact and Dennis nodded confirmatively.

"I have that. Let alone your decoying me up to this God-forsaken jumping-off place, you've been like a bear with a sore head. Time was when you'd not rest if a murder or burglary appeared in the papers before you'd got down to headquarters and talked it over with the Inspector and 'twas the breath of life to you till it was settled, to say nothing of the cases you horned in on long after you retired from the force and worked out when nobody else could. It's me that knows, for you dragged me through most of them with you.—She's knocking again!"

With a profane vocal accompaniment Dennis gave his attention for a moment to the cranky little engine and then went on: "In the last two months there've been three murders that were puzzling enough to have brought you up on your toes in the old days: the millionaire that was found doubled up in the telephone booth, and the girl's body in the stolen car and that minister on the top floor of a gambling house where he'd no business to be, alive or dead. And were you snooping around headquarters or looking into the evidence for yourself or telling me what you thought of them? You were not! You read the papers and smoked more than was good for you and took long walks by your lone and bit the head off anybody that as much as said 'murder' to you! If you'll give me the answer——?"

"There's none. I'm tired of butting in, that's all." McCarty felt vainly for a match in the pockets beneath his slicker and then sat back once more. "The Department is full of keen young lads who know more than we old-timers ever did, and there's been so many new kinds of science invented to track down crooks that the methods good enough in my day are a joke. Every time I've stuck in my oar since I left the force I swore would be the last and now I mean it. I'm a respectable private citizen and I'm going to stay so. I misdoubt but next year I'll be taking up golf."

"Or croquet!" Dennis suggested with withering scorn. The engine was thumping and churning once more but its guardian was for the moment oblivious. "Private citizen, my eye! I might be retired on a pension for ten years but if I heard a noise in my sleep that sounded like a gong wouldn't I be reaching out for my pants before I drew my next breath? 'Tis second nature to us now, each in our own line, but I suppose you're kidding yourself that if a dead body was to come and lay down here at your feet you'd call the nearest bull and walk away?"

"There'd be none to call unless they were better swimmers than most." McCarty gazed again out over the vast stretch of sea and then added: "No, Denny, I'm done. I've proved that by minding my own business in the last few months, as you've just argued, and I'm at peace with the world. As long as there are men and women there'll be love, good or bad, and the desire for more than they can gain rightfully, and the fear of what

they've done or what somebody's got on them, and when there's no other way out they'll turn to crime. Just so long, too, there'll be the law to hunt them down, but Timothy McCarty, by the grace of common sense, is through! I'll never touch another case."

"Then if it's not old age, 'tis matrimony!" exclaimed the other, aghast. "In all the years I've known you not a woman have you looked at twice, but there's no fool——!"

"There is not!" interrupted McCarty. "Well I know the rest of what you mean, my lad, and while night is coming on and you've been giving me the devil and all you've taken your hand off your number, for the engine has gone dead on you!"

It was true. The asthmatic motor was still and the slap-slap of the water against the sides of the dory was the only sound which broke the silence until Dennis lifted up his voice and anathematized all mechanical contrivances in general and the one before him in particular. He did it with such fluency and gusto that his companion, having found a match at last, sat puffing at his cigar and enjoying the unusual burst of oratory, until it was borne in upon him that the swaying motion of the boat was perceptibly increasing.

"Is it your hammering and tinkering or the language you're using that's rocking the boat, Denny?" he inquired at last. "Not that I mind, but the water that is coming over the sides might give that engine more of an excuse to lay down on you than it has already."

"There's always more motion when you're standing

still in a tub like this than when it's going, if it ever does steady!" Without looking up, Dennis added a poignant condemnatory sentence or two concerning the fisherman from whom they had hired the dory, and added: "If you're afraid of spoiling that elegant shine you got in Plimptonport, put the feet of you up on the seat. I'm going to get this thing started if it takes till morning."

"Always providing we're afloat by then." The oily sea had become choppy and the brassy twilight sky had taken on an angry, reddish tinge, but McCarty discreetly forbore drawing the attention of his companion to the change. "You don't think we've sprung a leak, by any chance?"

Dennis paused in his labors to wipe his brow and glanced about him. The next moment he had jumped to his feet.

"Holy Saints!" he cried. "We're in for it now! Will you take a look at that sky? 'Tis as though all Five were sounding and the water is heaving like the breast of an angry woman! No wonder we have all the sea to ourselves, as you said awhile back; them that know the signs of the weather in these parts have beaten it for shore long since!"

"It does look like a bit of a squall," McCarty admitted judiciously. "If you can get that engine going again maybe we can put in somewhere before it breaks."

"Mac, if this was a racing machine and, me the most dare-devil driver that ever took a hairpin turn on two wheels, we'd never make Plimptonport or Matta-whoze in time; and the open water is better for us than the

rocks that lies between the two of them." Dennis laid aside his tools and snuggled himself more tightly into his oil-skins. "The storm that's on us will make Noah's flood look like the sprinkle of a garden hose, but we'll ride it out if this scow holds together."

"It's funny there's no wind but just these little puffs." McCarty's tone held a trace of uneasiness as his companion's became philosophic. "Maybe you were right about it being a bit late in the afternoon to start out for Mattagansett, but if you were a cigar smoker like me, Denny, and could get nothing in Plimptonport but bits of hangman's rope——! Do you think that murdering fisherman rented us this outfit to get the insurance?"

Dennis did not reply. He had cupped one huge, outstanding ear with his hand and a tense, listening attitude had stiffened his awkward body. McCarty became aware of a dull, heavy droning sound that seemed to vibrate in the air about them like the subdued humming of mighty, distant machines.

Anxiety making him irritable, he demanded, "What's it you're hearing now? That's no roar of waves anywhere, for we're in the Sound, not on the ocean. It isn't thunder, off in the distance? For the love of Mike, say something!"

"It's not the roar of water I'm listening to, but the wind that's coming." Dennis glanced once more at the horizon and pointed. "Do you see that black, funnel-shaped cloud whirling 'round and 'round and spreading as it gets near? 'Tis that bringing it."

"Glory be!" exclaimed the ex-roundsman, awe-struck,

as the sable menace rose over them blotting out the lurid glare, as if by magic, and darkening the waters. "You've dived into many a cellar that poured out black death at you, Denny, and I've followed more than one killer up an alley when I couldn't see my hand before my face, but this is the worst the two of us have ever struck! What are you doing now?"

"Making things as snug as I can before she hits us." Dennis was gathering up the tools and stowing them away as he spoke. "Lend me a hand till we tie this bit of tarpaulin down over the engine and get that pan out from under your seat. We may need it to scoop part of Nantucket Sound out of this private yacht of ours before the storm is over."

McCarty obeyed in silence. A certain grimness had replaced his outward perturbation, but all at once he lifted his head. The droning sound had changed to a muffled booming; the great funnel had spread until all the sky was covered; and then, with a sullen roar, the squall burst upon them.

"Grab that oar there and try to help me keep her headed up—straight up into that wall of water that's coming!" Dennis yelled above the bellowing wind. "It's our only chance! If she catches us broadside——!"

But straight up the wall of water they climbed to hang for a shuddering moment on its crest and then swoop down into the seething depths with a suction which drew them backward with incredible velocity nearer and nearer the shore line, invisible now in the swirling

darkness, but dotted here and there along its low-lying strand with small, jutting points of rock. Dennis had spoken truly when he said that the open water, tumultuous as it had now become, would be better for them than a hit-or-miss wind-driven landing on the coast.

Landsmen though they were, they managed to breast roller after roller during the long hour that followed, although the wind drove them farther and farther inshore. But with a final strenuous effort McCarty's oar broke and he landed with an ignominious splash in the bottom of the dory. Battered by wind and spray, jostled and flung about like a mere manikin by the heaving waters beneath their craft, he scrambled back to his seat and, clinging there, howled through the maelstrom in the direction that his companion's gaunt, tenacious figure still loomed.

"Denny," he shrieked, "I can't help you now, lad! The oar's gone! You'll have to stick it out alone with that bit of a pole——!"

"Hold tight and save your breath!" Dennis bawled back. "Here comes another one!"

What happened immediately thereafter was never quite clear in McCarty's memory. Giant hands seemed to raise the dory, turning it in mid-air, his grasp was torn loose and he was hurled down, down into limitless depths of waters that dragged him onward with the rush and fury of malign forces which he had never combated before.

His heart was bursting, his lungs crushed with a

weight through which searing agony darted, but struck out blindly, instinctively—and then a hideo smashing impact seemed to split his very skull and consciousness was blotted out.

CHAPTER II

THE CABIN ON THE DUNES

A CONTINUOUS rolling and rumbling as of multitudinous drums, jagged forks of white light followed by reverberating crashes which shook the universe and the wailing of a host of demons that rose to a shriek and died in shuddering moans! These were the first impressions of ex-roundsman McCarty and he drew his own conclusions. He had passed into the next world, there could be no doubt of that, but he had never thought of being in that division of it. True, he had given as little serious consideration to his ultimate chances as the average healthy, optimistic man of his type, but he had taken it for granted that he would get about as good a deal as the next one. And yet he must have somehow let himself in for purgatory!

He did not quail at the prospect, but rather an overmastering curiosity possessed him. So imperative was it, that instinctively he opened his eyes. Just as he did, that jagged white glare came again; and his lids closed with a grunt of mingled comprehension and physical pain.

He wasn't dead, after all. He was lying somewhere,

in the midst of a thunder-storm, on a slimy rock half in and half out of water that dashed stinging spray over him and ground steel-pointed particles of sand into the very marrow of his being. He felt as bruised and battered as if one of the ward gangs had got him in the old days, and something had stove in the side of his head just over the ear; but he did not, for the moment, attempt to move or take more accurate account of casualties.

How in the name of all that was incredible had he, Timothy McCarty, come to be where he was, and what had happened to him? Why wasn't he home in his own comfortable, shabby, bachelor quarters over the antique shop in that quiet New York side-street? He'd resolutely kept from butting in on any of the cases of the Department lately and had wanted to get away from it all; there'd been some talk between him and Dennis of a vacation——!

McCarty sat up, suddenly regardless of his aching back and head and the precariousness of his slippery perch, and memory came back in an overwhelming tide. Denny—the fishing trip to Cape Cod—the random choice of that ramshackled clutter of shanties called Plimptonport—the equally casual meeting and bargain with the taciturn old fisherman for the use of his hut and his dory—the start for Mattagansett—the storm—and then chaos! They'd been swamped, shipwrecked, and he'd been flung upon the shore with his head against a rock that had knocked the senses out of him, but *where was Denny?* By the Blessed Saints, where was he?

Lurching, slipping, reeling with the agony of his battered head and buffeted by the howling wind, McCarty managed to scramble to the strip of beach. He dashed his torn oil-skin sleeve across his eyes to rid them of a sudden, blinding moisture that was neither spray nor rain, while by the next revealing flash of lightning he gazed wildly about him at the deserted expanse of sand dunes and tumbling waters; and his voice rose above the warring elements in a cry which bore with it all the brotherly love of their lifetime of companionship and the anguish of dread of what might be.

"Denny! Denny! For the love of God answer me! 'Tis Mac that's calling! Where are you? Denny!"

He ran and fell and staggered to his feet again, only to fling himself onward in mad rushes to and fro which carried him, now waist-deep into the water, now halfway up the shelving side of a sand dune. But ever his hoarse shout was driven back into his throat and only the roar of the wind answered him.

At length he dropped exhausted upon the sodden beach and lay with the rain beating down upon him, while great sobs tore their way from his breast. Dennis Riordan was gone! Tumbling about somewhere out in that black waste of sea under the stormy night sky was the body of his friend, his pal who had followed him through every adventure, grave or gay, steeped in the quiet contentment of utter congeniality or fraught with hazard! Denny, his confidant since they had come green to the new country and each won his way into the department of service for which he was best fitted, maintaining a comradeship un-

shakable through all the years that followed! Denny was gone!

How long he lay there McCarty did not know; but the roar of thunder and flash of lightning had abated and only the rain still fell in slanting sheets when at length he dragged himself once more to his feet and stumbled blindly forward, not realizing or caring in what direction he was headed, and indeed scarcely conscious of the impulse which urged him on. The blackness of a Stygian night enveloped him, and his brain, still dazed from the blow that had all but fractured his skull, could focus only upon the devastating fact of his grief. He clambered over hillocks and mounds of sand where coarse grasses brushed his knees and strange things crawled and scurried away at his approach. Once, great, wet-feathered wings flapped almost in his face and the plaintive, startled cry of a sea-bird rose eerily, and once his foot touched something hard and round, which scuttled off precipitately; but he was oblivious to all about him until, breasting the rise of a dune, he beheld a light!

It was a mere red glow, faint and flickering, but McCarty saw that it outlined a small window just ahead, and about it loomed the rude bulk of a cabin against the lesser black of the sky.

He thought that he shouted, but the sound that issued from his cracked lips, as he waved his arms and lurched drunkenly forward, was only an inarticulate mumble. The glow seemed to recede maddeningly before him as the sodden sand sucked back his unsteady

feet and his wavering knees all but gave way; yet he kept doggedly on and at last reached the small, level space upon which the cabin stood.

He saw then that he was facing its side, for there was no opening in the weather-beaten wall save the single window in its center. It had evidently been boarded up and the glow emanated from an aperture through which a pole of some sort, with an iron hook on the end, had been thrust outward. There was something strange about that smoldering light, too; it did not beam from any lamp or candle within the range of McCarty's vision as he clung to the splintered ledge and peered within, but seemed, rather, to rise from the floor, and the outlines of a few rough, scattered pieces of furniture came to him through a dim, smoky haze.

Releasing his hold upon the ledge, he felt his way along the wall to the seaward corner and around it, past a second window—this one so securely boarded that only a faint glimmer stole through a chink here and there—and so he reached the door.

It seemed frail and sagging when he knocked upon it, but there was no answer to his summons even when he croaked out a peremptory hail and rattled the latch; and all at once the conviction penetrated his dulled senses that something was vitally wrong. Raising his fist, he drove again and again at the panels, but the door held until a mighty kick burst it from its corroded hinges and sent it toppling inward, the impetus carrying McCarty to his knees. In this position he remained for a moment, jarred anew in his weakened state, while his starting eyes

took in the scene before him. The rush of wind which had entered when he burst the door cleared away the haze hanging thickly on the air of the low-raftered room. At once, the intruder was aware of a rude bunk in a corner at the back with a seaman's chest beside it, a rusted stove flanked by a cupboard and a heap of driftwood against the wall opposite the broken window, and a table with two overturned chairs on either side of it in the center of the cabin. Between it and the doorway, so close that one of her shoes almost touched his knee, lay the body of a woman.

McCarty's eyes met her brown ones, set in a fixed stare, but wrenched themselves away and traveled past the gaping wound in her side to the great, bloodstained iron hook half hidden in the shadows under the table, yet upon which the glow flickered redly. Then in the draught it suddenly flared up, and he saw the darting flame in a tiny pile of shavings just beneath the broken window.

In a flash he had leaped to his feet, dashed around the corner of the table and trampled out the creeping menace. It died in an angry sputter of hissing smoke. And it was only when utter darkness descended and he staggered back weakly for support, as his spurt of false strength failed, that he realized the situation. He was alone in an isolated cabin on an unknown part of the coast with the body of a strange woman, strangely murdered, lying within reach of his hand!

It would have taken a greater psychologist than he, keen analyst of human nature as he had proved himself,

to have told why it was that at that moment Timothy McCarty, injured and storm-spent and grieved to the heart of him by the loss of his best friend, became without volition once again the "Mac" of the old department days and forced his dazed brain and bruised body to the task which confronted him.

A light; that was the first thing. He must have a light in order to examine the scene and photograph it upon his memory, and then, somehow, from somewhere he must summon whoever was in charge of the law's keeping in this desolate waste. His mind traveled back with lightning speed to that moment in the dory just after the engine failed when he had finally found a match for his cigar in one of his pockets. Had it been the last one? Frantically he tore open his slicker and searched, and a grim chuckle of exultation escaped him as his fingers closed upon a small tin box of wax vespers which must have remained forgotten in the pocket of his old sweater since his last fishing trip. It rattled reassuringly as he drew it forth. If only the tiny receptacle had proved watertight during his plunge overboard and his mad drive inshore!

The first taper bent as he tried to ignite it on the corrugated bottom of the little box and he dropped it at his feet, but the second flared up like a miniature candle and, shielding its flame from the draught between door and window, McCarty straightened and turned slowly. Upon the table against which he had leaned for support stood a bent and rusted lantern of antiquated make, and he lifted and shook it experimentally. The slosh and

gurgle from within told him that it must be at least half full, and he lighted it and set it back carefully upon the space ringed in the dust of the table top from which he had taken it. The uneven wick spluttered and sent up a tongue of flame from which curled a malodorous spiral of turgid black smoke, but McCarty turned it down to a sickly glow that cast weird shadows overhead and into the cluttered corners of the cabin.

The draught was still a menace, however, and crossing to the door he thrust it back as securely as he was able into its sagging casing. It was odd that the hinges should have given way before his onslaught rather than the latch, for the latter appeared equally corroded and time-worn, and neither lock nor bolt augmented it on the inside; yet although it moved up and down squeakily when he jerked it, the door itself remained immovable in the jamb on that side, as if held fast from without by invisible hands.

He could not pause to examine it further, for the still figure upon the floor required his immediate attention, and turning, he knelt in a dry space on the rough boards beside the body. The woman must have been in her early thirties and pretty, for the great, brown eyes which stared so fixedly below straight, finely-etched brows were fringed with long, dark, curling lashes and the nose was small and straight; in the smooth cheeks and full, sensuous, parted lips a trace of color seemed yet to linger, although the flesh was cold and already taking on a waxen rigidity of contour.

There was evidence in plenty besides the overturned chairs that she had not sold her life cheaply. Although the left hand, swollen and slightly mottled, lay relaxed at her side, the fingers of the other were still curved about a broken, bloodstained ax-handle; her black gown of some soft filmy stuff was torn and the buttons ripped off the heavy, rough tweed coat which covered it, while her luxuriant masses of chestnut hair, lustrous as in life, rippled in disheveled waves to the very knees of the prostrate form, a tattered brown veil trailing from it.

McCarty did not note the incongruity between the gown and cloak nor the second similar detail: that the slim, daintily arched ankles were encased in black silk of cobweb thinness but the low shoes, although small and perfectly fitting, were of the sport variety in tan leather, heavy and thick-soled with flat heels and broad toes. The strangeness of the woman's presence there at all in the lonely, deserted fisherman's hut, much less the violence and atrocity of the mode of her death outweighed for the time being all minor considerations; and he rose somewhat giddily to his feet, righted the chair on the farther side of the table and sat down to think the matter out.

It was easy enough to divine the source of the tiny, smoldering blaze that he had stamped out on entering, for the shavings in which it had been started were freshly whittled from the topmost plank of the pile of driftwood by the stove. They shone with a yellow, viscid fluid which trailed from them to form a telltale

pool near the body itself, mingling with the sinister, congealed stain that had spread from the gaping wound in the side of the woman's breast.

McCarty recalled, too, the heavy smudge of smoke that had filled the cabin in spite of the broken window through which the rain had beaten, and dimly his numbed faculties began to reason out the situation. The woman's murderer had set fire to the cabin with kerosene-soaked shavings and departed, trusting that the raging storm would lead the countryside to believe the place had been struck by lightning. But somehow that long pole had been jarred from among those others, uptilted high against the wall in the corner, and had crashed forward, its hook driving through the old boards which covered the window and letting in the rain to battle with the incipient blaze.

Had it not been for that, the little shack and its grim secret must have gone up in flames together; but one element had held the other in check until McCarty arrived to decide the issue. How long could it have been since the murderer's departure? How long had hissing flame and driving rain fought for supremacy while that motionless figure looked on with staring, indifferent eyes? If he could only gather his scattered wits together and think clearly! What could be the matter with him, anyhow? He'd had many a worse rap on the skull in the old days on the force than that bit of a rock could have given him when he landed against it, and yet he felt queer and dizzy and sick, and everything began to jumble together in his mind.

For the first time McCarty put his hand up to his aching head, and then withdrew it quickly as he encountered something sticky and moist. He was sitting hunched over, staring at the clotted brown stain upon his thick fingers, when the door was suddenly burst open for the second time and a gaunt, elderly man in oil-skins, with starting eyes and waggling gray chin whiskers, pointed an ancient revolver at him and demanded:

"Put up your hands! Ain't no chance for ye, desp'rit as ye be! Ye're under arrest!"

"What's that you say?" McCarty stared at him, uncomprehending. Many a time had he heard that last curt sentence, but it had issued from his own lips! Was this old blatherskite of a hick talking to him?

"Up with your hands, I tell ye! Great Jehoshaphat, there's blood on 'em right now! I ben a-watchin' ye through that thar winder an' I warn ye, ef ye make a move I'll shoot holes clear through ye!" The stranger's voice fairly squeaked with excitement, and the hand which held the revolver was shaking. "Ye killed this here poor critter, did ye?"

McCarty had obeyed the injunction mechanically; but the last question roused him from his lethargy.

"Me?" He checked an insane desire to laugh. Ex-Roundsman McCarty, late of the Finest, to be accused of murder! "Say, who in hell are you, anyway?"

"I'm the Constubble of Spindrift Cove, an' ye'll come right along to the lockup peaceable or deader'n a doornail! Who be you an' this feemale ye killed an' how did ye git here?"

How did he get there? The experiences of the afternoon rushed over him once more in an overwhelming flood, blotting out the cabin with its tragic occupant and the absurd, menacing figure before him. The storm, the wreck—and Denny! Denny, out there! What did anything matter now?

"I've nothing to say," McCarty replied dully. "I'm—incog!"

CHAPTER III

SUSPECTS

A STREAK of sunshine like a tiny, pointing finger came through a crevice in the iron-shuttered window and traveled over the chair, on which stood a tin basin and dipper of water, to the bandaged head of the man who lay on the cot beneath a crazy-quilt cover. Straight to one of his closed eyes it crept, and he stirred uneasily, muttering something beneath his breath.

The finger did not move, however, but seemed boring in and at last, after vainly moving from side to side on the thin pillow, McCarty opened his eyes and turned to avoid the light and close them again, stifling a groan as his stiffened muscles protested at the effort. He had been awake for an hour or more, awake when the fat, middle-aged little doctor had waddled in to apply fresh bandages to his head, escorted by the angular, chin-whiskered constable. He was still fully conscious when the latter returned alone to stand gazing at him uncertainly for awhile, shaking his head, and then finally to depart with an officious rattle of keys and bolts on the door; but he had given no sign.

He didn't want to be questioned and gaped at; he

didn't want to think. With the passing of Denny life held nothing more for him than a dreary round of lonely, empty days waiting for old age to claim its own. The scene in the cabin during the previous night was like a dream; little did it matter to him where the woman came from or who murdered her! Let them have him up at the inquest, and held for the Grand Jury, and tried and convicted for all he cared! He'd not open his mouth, though. Inspector Druet and the boys at headquarters should never have it on Ex-Roundsman McCarty that he had to go out to the sand hills and cranberry bogs to be arrested, accused of murder! That much he owed to the "Mac" of the old days. The rest didn't make any difference.

He wished, though, that it wasn't so infernally hot and that the fool who was tapping away somewhere near with a metallic clink as though he were mending a tin roof, likely, would stop altogether or else change the regular beat of his little hammer. Twelve strokes, the space of a breath, and then twelve more, over and over as though they were rapping on his very skull. Twelve—twelve! It was like the old fire alarm signal for the police call. Denny had taught him all the signals in idle times back in the engine house. . . . Why couldn't he stop thinking?

McCarty kicked at the patchwork coverlet and sighed profoundly. He supposed that old grasshopper of a constable would return presently, when he'd done boasting at the post-office, maybe, about his thrilling capture of the night before. There hadn't been much to it, in

McCarty's opinion, from the moment when the futility of everything swept over him. He had listened in a stubborn, indifferent silence to the flood of questions squeaked at him in that cracked voice and had submitted tamely enough to being handcuffed—he!—and half-dragged, half-jostled over miles of slithering sand dunes to a plank walk with a row of little cottages and shanties on either side; shanties in which lights sprang up quickly enough in response to the hoarse shouts of his captor.

A straggling retinue of half-clad, leathery-looking men, most of them seemingly old, had trailed along in their wake with lanterns as they proceeded up the crooked street. When they halted before the stone cottage, only slightly larger than the other in which he was now incarcerated, quite a little crowd had gathered.

McCarty didn't remember much about the rest. The constable had told his tale with endless repetitions and there had been a lot of excitement and loud talking but nobody had offered him any violence, although he wouldn't have cared particularly if they had. Finally they had taken him inside and bound up his head and given him a drink of water and offered him food—from which he had turned in loathing—and put him to bed, but it was all a confused jumble in his thoughts.

If only that confounded tinkering would stop! The number of strokes had changed now, though, thanks be! They had shortened by half. Six, and then six; six and six. That was the borough signal for Manhattan and the Bronx in the Fire Code. Why couldn't he stop listening to it, stop counting them! There—the fool

was off again at his first tune, twelve taps and twelve, then six again and six——!

All at once McCarty's heart seemed to stop beating and the blood pounded in his ears at the mad thought that had come to him. It couldn't be, of course. He was going crazy! Dennis was drowned, his body washing around somewhere out there in the deceitful waters of Nantucket Sound. He couldn't be alive and near, it couldn't be *he* that was tapping, sending out the old signals——

With a mighty heave McCarty sat up in his cot and glanced about wildly. Crazy or no, it was no spirit that was making that tinkling, insistent sound and it would do no harm to try an answer. But how could he with his handcuffed wrists and bare feet and not a thing in the room——? Then his eyes fell upon the chair beside him and awkwardly, with the left hand perforce following and impeding the right, he emptied the water from the dipper into the tin basin and then rapped gently with it upon the latter's rim.

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve. It was the call for the fire patrol, the single twelve, and the only signal which occurred to him, in his frenzy of half-incredulous hope, that might convey his message.

There was a tense moment of utter silence, for the other tapping had ceased, and then it came again, nine strokes and then nine—the simultaneous call!

No celestial music could have been sweeter to mortal ears. McCarty sank weakly back with a tear rolling

down his cheek, but the next moment he had started up, for the tapping had recommenced.

"One—two—three——" He counted to sixteen strokes. In the stillness that followed a grin grew and broadened on his face and his shoulders shook in a soundless chuckle. It was the first joke that ever Dennis had made in his life, bless the soul of him, for it was the call for boat tenders! Boat "tenders" they had been indeed on the previous afternoon, and a precious mess had they made of it!

Then a fresh thought struck him and the grin disappeared. Denny was alive, even though it seemed like a miracle, but he couldn't be on the outside signaling in! Why was he under arrest too? Could it be in connection with the murder? The code in its application to their present needs was limited, but quickly McCarty seized the dipper once more and rapped five times upon the basin, repeating the message twice again in even succession. It was the Fifth Alarm; it would at least let Denny know that they were in a serious predicament if he didn't realize it already, and warn him to be on his guard.

Almost instantly his signal was repeated to him and this time he could tell that the tapping came from somewhere on the other side of the partition wall. Dennis knew they were in danger, he had understood! There was silence then for a space, for Denny was evidently waiting and McCarty was thinking hard. Had the other been injured? How could he convey the question? Only one way occurred to him. He tapped out thirteen

measured strokes and stopped. It was the signal of an accident to apparatus.

A longer pause ensued as if Dennis found it difficult to reply. Then at length came the answer: Four—four—four. The ambulance call!

A cold sweat broke out on McCarty's forehead and once more his heart seemed to stop. But the reassuring thought came to him that his companion in distress could not be badly hurt or he would have been taken elsewhere for better attention, even under heavy guard, if by any wild guess on the part of the constable he had been accused of complicity in the murder; moreover, he had kept up that steady tapping for a solid hour at least before McCarty had understood and responded, and no mortal man could have stuck to that if he were in great pain.

But how in the name of the blessed saints who preserved him had Dennis got ashore? He was no swimmer, as McCarty remembered from an experience at a certain annual outing a few years before, and the veriest human fish could not have guided his own passage through those tumultuous waters of last night. Why hadn't Denny heard and answered his frantic calls from the beach? And if later he had chanced to be anywhere near that cabin, why hadn't he made his presence known? He could have seen McCarty through that broken window as well as the constable had done and it wasn't like him——?

His crowding, perplexed thoughts were broken in upon

by a renewed, insistent tapping, but he had not time to count the strokes before a louder sound came from the hall outside; the heavy, shambling footsteps of the constable, which he had come to recognize.

Tightening his hold upon the handle of the dipper, McCarty cut in on the other message by rapping sharply against the basin eleven times and then, after a moment's interval, eleven times more. He had barely finished when the bolts were shot back and the constable jumped like a rheumatic jack-in-the-box into the room.

"Hey, what in time's the matter with ye?" he demanded. "Teched in the head er somethin', the way you're bangin' things around?"

McCarty scowled at him, wondering if his message had got through. He had been obliged to rap hastily and the meaning of it would have been a complicated one at best for the plodding mind of Dennis to grasp. It was the signal to reduce or shut down pressure on high pressure service if the telephone service were disabled. Would Denny be able to translate that as a simple warning to shut up, to break off communication? Then he realized in profound disgust at his own density that if a light, metallic tapping could be heard voices would carry, and his scowl changed to a bland smile, much to the bewilderment of his jailer.

"Good morning, Sheriff!" he called cheerily. "I just wanted a little more water. I guess I must have been pretty well dazed from banging my head against the rocks when I was washed ashore last night in the storm

to have blundered into the bit of a house there where the poor lady, heaven rest her, lay dead. What happened to her?"

"So that's the story ye thought up while ye ben layin' here, is it?" His visitor snickered. "I be the constubble, not the sheriff, but even he ain't a-goin' to ask that question when he gits here! Reckon the hull Cove knows what killed her an' whose hand held the weapon! But ye better eat these here doughnuts an' drink this coffee Mis' Griscom sent in to ye, an' then git into your boots. Ef ye've made up your mind to talk I want witnesses!"

"What have I got to do with it?" McCarty raised his voice. "I'm obliged to Mrs. Griscom, whoever she may be, for my breakfast, but I'll be more obliged to you if you'll tell me what I'm here for?"

"Holt your hosses!" the constable advised grimly. "Doc Allen—he's the cor'ner—he'll tell ye ef ye can't guess! They ain't a mite o' use in ye a-tryin' to lie out o' it 'cause I caught ye red-handed, but we'll hear what ye've got to say! I'll be back for ye in ten minutes."

McCarty gulped down the crisp doughnuts and scalding coffee hastily, for sudden sounds of wordy strife had come from the other side of the wall and he feared what Dennis might say or do. The situation in which he was himself placed had all at once dawned upon him, and he did not want his devoted, blundering companion mixed up in it. Moreover, a resolution was taking shape and form in his mind. Despite his protestations of the previous day, with his knowledge of Denny's

safety the fascination of the mystery had gripped him, the old fever of the chase had returned once more, and, although he remained incognito, he meant to get in the game.

"You knock-kneed old sand-flea!" Dennis' tones arose in wrathful scorn. "I'll have you know that if you're trying to make out that the lad in there——!"

"So ye know him, do ye?" The constable's high-pitched, nasal voice broke in triumphantly. "I 'spicioned as much an' that's why I jailed ye! Amasa Hite may think this here case'll wait for him to take his own time gittin' over from Barnstubble, but I reckon we'll hev it all cl'ared up afore he sets foot in the Cove! They was two o'ye in this, then!"

McCarty arose precipitately, although he reeled from sudden weakness and his head throbbed anew. Where were those confounded boots of his, anyway, and how was he to get them on with his wrists manacled? He had meant to acquaint Dennis with what had happened in that cabin on the night before but not to summon a loyal, hot-headed champion to his own personal defense. Bright dots danced before his eyes and he was groping about blindly when he heard Dennis reply in the quiet accents he knew to be most dangerous:

"Yes. There are two of us. I don't know just what charge it is you're trying to frame up, you hick bull, but whatever it is, it goes double and takes me in too, and sorry you'll be that ever you saw this day! The man you've picked on——!"

"Constable!" yelled McCarty desperately, as he grabbed

the dipper once more and sounded a furious warning. "Constable, if you don't come and help me on with my boots I'll break jail and start looking for you!"

A door slammed and bolts rattled somewhere. The heavy feet shambled along the corridor hurriedly, but they were intercepted, and McCarty heard the hearty though lowered tones of the doctor who had bandaged his head. He could not distinguish the words but a sort of argument appeared to be taking place, and at its conclusion the constable entered once more. He was shaking his head and tugging furiously at the tuft of sparse gray whiskers which stood out so stubbornly on his chin, but the gleam of triumph in his eyes had given place to a shade of uneasiness.

"Be you ready?" he asked. "Cor'ner's waitin'. Feelin' kindo' meechin' yit, eh? Lemme git a-holt o' them thar boots ye ben raisin' Cain about. Now, come on!"

He shoved McCarty ahead of him out into a short corridor and to a wide room flooded with sunshine at its end, which had evidently been at some former time a kitchen, for a huge, old fireplace at the side had been bricked up, a sink with an iron pump stood in one corner and cupboards had been built in about the walls. They were disused now, however, and the room was furnished only with a table and some plain chairs.

The fat, little doctor, with his absurd, pendulous cheeks, beak-shaped nose and small, bright eyes, looked up from some papers upon which he had been writing and nodded pleasantly.

"Feeling better now? Sit him down here, Eb—— That was a nasty cut you had on your head."

"Yes, sir," McCarty replied as he dropped into the chair indicated, for he was still dizzy. "I must have got it on a rock or something when I was thrown overboard last night."

"Hain't I ben tellin' ye, Doc?" the constable shrilled, but the other stopped him with a gesture.

"I'm the coroner here in Spindrift Cove, and of course you don't have to talk till the inquest if you've a mind not to," he announced. "Constable Bartlett says you refused to say anything when he found you with a dead woman in a shack on the shore last night, but now that you've had time to kind of get your mind settled to think things over you must see that it'd be better for you to tell us who you are and how you come to get there, and just what happened."

"I don't know that last any more than you, Doctor," responded McCarty frankly, but for the moment he ignored the first question. "The woman was laying dead on the floor and the place looked like there'd been a struggle going on, but nobody else was there when I saw a light and broke into the cabin only a little while before the constable showed up. I'd been wrecked further along the beach somewhere."

"From what ship?" asked the coroner quickly.

"'Twas the *Lucy*—something, just a bit of a fishing boat with a bum engine in it that my friend and I had rented from an old geezer in a place called Plimpton-

port, not three hours before the storm, and started for Mattagansett in."

"Plimptonport, hey?" Constable Bartlett broke in. "It don't take no three hours to git to Mattagansett in a mutter-boat——!"

"The engine went dead on us and we drifted around not knowing where in the world we were till near night when that cloud came up and the devil and all was let loose," McCarty explained. "My friend was thrown out the same as me when the boat went over and I guess he was pretty well banged up, too, for when I got my wits back and found myself on the sand I hunted and hollered for him in the night and the storm for hours, it seemed like, but he didn't answer. He must have been picked up—— Surely you've had news of him, Doctor?"

During his detailed explanation he had been watching the faces of the two men shrewdly, and as he turned to the stout, seated figure he saw a significant glance pass between them.

"What did you say his name was?" the coroner countered, but the irrepressible constable saved McCarty from the necessity of an immediate reply.

"Who was the feller let ye the mutter-boat, thar to Plimptonport?"

"I don't know his name, didn't ask him. He rented us an old shanty down on the sand, and he was going to rig us up whatever tackle we needed for a couple of weeks' fishing." McCarty was still studying his inquisitors furtively. "He looked like a codfish himself, with the big mouth and pop eyes of him, and hands that

worked for all the world as though they were flippers!"

The constable gave a quick start, then yanked more violently at his whiskers than ever, and the shadow of doubt deepened in his eyes as they met those of the coroner once more. Then he set his spare shoulders obstinately.

"Was the woman with ye then or did ye meet her here to the Cove? I don't keer how ye got here, reecollect I come on ye thar in the cabin with her blood onto your hands, thar been't no way o' gittin' out o' that!" He brought his gnarled fist down on the table in exasperation. "By Jehoshaphat, it was murder, an' I'm a-goin' to prove ye done it!"

The coroner shook his head disapprovingly, but before he could speak there came a sudden commotion in the hall and a stocky, thick-set man in a short, rough coat and faded, corduroy trousers, tucked into high boots, burst precipitately through the doorway. His light, protruding eyes and huge mouth gave him a ludicrous resemblance to a codfish which was further emphasized by the aimless, flapping gesture of his splay hands as he halted at sight of the rural officials.

" 'Mornin', Doc Allen. I heerd tell o' the doin's last night an' that my dory——! That be one o' 'em, now!" The newcomer had all at once recognized McCarty. "Thar be one o' the two city strangers who hired my *Lucy Jane* an' lost her. I want ev'ry last dollar she was wuth!"

In spite of the belligerent attitude of the speaker McCarty could have fallen upon him and embraced him, for the recognition had been mutual. It was, indeed,

the "old geezer" from whom they had hired the dory! But for his fortuitous arrival, it might not have been easy for either himself or Denny to prove the fact of their having been cast away on the shore; yet to McCarty's pain-dulled mind it did not alter his own situation. He had no witness to swear that the woman was already dead when he broke in the cabin.

"You positively identify this man, Capt'n Pickens?" A deeper note of authority had come into the coroner's tones. "Who else was with him in Plimptonport?"

"Just another stranger, taller an' long-sparred. Fergit their names——"

"Was there a woman with them?" Doctor Allen interrupted quickly.

"No. Seen 'em from the time they git off the New Bedford train at the deepo, Doc, an' they was alone." Captain Pickens shook his head and his pale eyes seemed to stick out still farther as he added: "Heerd they was murder done to some strange woman over here to the Cove last night an' they was mixed up in it some ways, but they set out by themselves in my *Lucy Jane* an' wrecked her, an' by crickey, I mean to git the pay for her before the sheriff comes to haul 'em over to Barnstubble! Some say Noah Griscom picked up t'other one——?"

"What time did they start from Plimptonport in the *Lucy Jane?*" the coroner broke in once more.

"Long 'bout five-thutty, nigh as I can figger. I went right hum to supper, an' thar warn't no sign o' the squall comin' then, but them lubbers cud 'a rid it out ef they'd

knowed a dory from a ottermobile! One on 'em's a-goin' to pay——!"

"Half past five." Doctor Allen nodded slowly at the constable. "That jibes with what this man says, Eb, and what the other told you. Better have him in and Capt'n Griscom, too. He stood by and picked him up at nine o'clock, he says, when the dory turned turtle.

The constable started for the door but on the threshold, he turned.

"I'll git 'em, jus's ye say, Doc, but we're wastin' a mighty lot o' time. It don't make a mite o' difference whether they started from Plimptonport or not, nor what time they was wrecked. The woman was killed in that shack an' thar be the murd'rer!"

He pointed a bony finger at McCarty, but the latter had suddenly grasped the drift of the coroner's questions and a great weight was lifted from his mind even before the latter's reply.

"No, Eb. I told you from the time I heard what Capt'n Griscom had to say I was afraid we were porting helm too soon. If this man here was swept ashore when the dory went over at nine, he couldn't have done it, for the woman's body shows she must have been dead even then!"

CHAPTER IV

ALLIES

"YE got to prove that, Doc!" the constable cried furiously. "That dory could hev been upsot a-puppose, or in tryin' to land him thar, an' he could hev hurried to the shack to meet the woman an' kill her! T'other one's confessed, I tell ye! He as much as told me right to my face that they was both on 'em in it together! Wait till I fetch him an' you'll see, by glory!"

He stamped off down the corridor and McCarty turned to the coroner.

"Was he hurt bad?—my friend, I mean? 'Tis grand news that he was picked up alive, Doctor, but I'm fearful maybe worse happened to him than to me! 'Twas a wicked storm, the night!"

"We just call that a blow, 'round these parts!" Captain Pickens interposed, sniffing contemptuously.

"Your friend has a badly sprained shoulder and bruised side but no ribs are broken," the doctor responded. "He was still suffering from shock, though, the last time I tried to talk to him; he would only say he was Dennis Riordan, and then keep calling for someone else."

"Who was it?" McCarty's face was a study.

"Someone he called just 'Mac'; that was all we could make out of it. He never said the rest of the name, only 'Mac,' over and over."

McCarty drew a deep breath.

"The old son-of-a-gun!" he exclaimed. "It's my friend Denny all right, and 'twas me he was calling for! Mac is my name, sir, Mac—Doe." He had bethought himself in time.

To his surprised gratification, Captain Pickens spoke up and added verification.

"I opine that's the truth, Doc. I reecollect the other one's name was 'Riordan,' for I hain't never heerd tell of it afore round the Cape, an' this was 'Mack' somethin'-or-other. But how about the *Lucy Jane?*"

McCarty had scarcely heard the latter portion of the speech. As long as Denny remained discreet his incognito was preserved and he could still keep to the letter the vow he had made to himself, yet take one last hand in the game. He would not be butting into the work of headquarters out in this wilderness, and the lads on the force would never know that he had once more emerged from his retirement. But, as *Mac Doe,* there was no reason why, when he was himself definitely cleared of all suspicion, he could not do a little investigating on his own account as to how the woman in the cabin had come by her death; and the very call of it was in his blood.

The coroner had spoken to him but McCarty was oblivious, for the door next that of his late cell had

opened and a familiar figure came with a series of leaps down the corridor to precipitate itself upon him.

"Mac, by all the saints! And me thinking it was lost you were, the whole of last night! The heart was gone out of me entirely and I could have wished that the captain had not come along in his boat and picked me up at all!"

His voice broke and there was a suspicious huskiness in McCarty's own tones as the latter replied:

"The both of us were saved, Denny, thanks be, though 'twas little help I got—barring from the doctor, here, that fixed up my head,—and a hard welcome! Wait till you hear!"

There was a covert warning in the last sentence but Dennis' emotions were in the ascendency.

"While I soushed up and down in the trough of the black water grappling for you with irons that brought up nothing, lad, and I thought of all we'd been through together and that it was the end——!" He choked and then added vehemently: "I was wishing the old guy that rented us the damned *Lucy Jane* had gone to the bottom himself before he ever——!"

"Oh, ye was, was ye?" Captain Pickens roared, stepping forward. "Well, I hain't, but I come to c'lect damages for her, an' here I be! I could hev sold her for sixty dollars only last week——"

"Dog-robber!" Dennis gave vent to the feelings surging within him in righteous indignation against the owner of the lost dory. "A wrecker would have charged you more than that to take the old tub down the bay and

sink it, and cheap at the price! We ought to have you jailed for renting out such a derelict!"

"Ye better git yerselves out o' jail first, hain't ye?" The captain flapped his arms in derision. "I don't say that you be murd'rers an' I don't put it past ye, neither, but I calc'late to git the sixty dollars——"

"Murd'rers?" Dennis advanced a step threateningly but winced at a painful reminder from his sprained shoulder, and McCarty laid soothing though handcuffed hands upon his arm.

"Let be, Denny, lad. We'll give the old skinflint his sixty and get rid of him, for we've more important business with Doctor Allen, here, I'm thinking." He felt helplessly toward his pockets, conscious that the coroner who had not spoken since Dennis' appearance was scrutinizing them both shrewdly. "How the devil am I to get at my money?"

"Here ye be!" The constable stepped forward from the doorway and presented McCarty with his own wallet, watch, and odds and ends tied in his handkerchief. "That's what ye had when I s'arched ye last night."

"Count it, Mac," Dennis advised. "Don't let them put anything more over on us than they have!"

McCarty took several bills from the flat, folded wad and held them out to Captain Pickens, whose wide mouth was avidly agape.

"Much obleeged!" He tucked the money down carefully into his boot. "Ef ye want them bags ye left over to my cabin, ye kin send for 'em from the Barnstubble jail!—— 'Mornin', Doc."

"Shut the door, Eb," the coroner said as the owner of the late *Lucy Jane* lurched at his rolling gait down the corridor. "Sit down, Mister Riordan, on this side of the table. Every minute of your time is accounted for from the hour you left Plimptonport yesterday afternoon until now. What time was that, by the way?"

"A little after five," Dennis replied bewilderedly. "I know, for my watch was fast and I had to ask Mac, here.—— What's up, now?"

McCarty had glanced inadvertently at the watch which the constable had put into his hands, and he uttered a low exclamation. It had been twisted and crushed almost beyond semblance of shape, but the bent hands pointed to ten minutes past nine. Silently he leaned forward and laid it on the table before the coroner.

"Did you see this, Eb?" the latter demanded. "Ten after nine; just ten minutes after Capt'n Griscom saw the *Lucy Jane* go over! That must've been when he was dashed up against a rock on shore."

Constable Bartlett clawed his whiskers again.

"A man c'd set his watch for any time he was a-mind to and then smash it to make it look's ef it'd be'n stopped then," he declared, although his high-pitched tones lacked conviction. "Ye be sot on y'r idee, Doc, but ef you sh'd be a mite wrong about the time the woman was killed——?"

"She'd been dead at least five hours when I examined the body, and Capt'n Griscom don't lie. If he says he saw the dory go over at nine——" The doctor paused. "Where is he, Eb? Why didn't you bring him here?"

"He'd gone out in his own dory; won't be hum till supper-time, Mis' Griscom says. But about that body in the cabin——"

"Look here!" Dennis interrupted. "What's all this talk about a dead woman and what has the time to do with it and why are we here? Answer me that! I was more dead than alive myself what with the worry about Mac and all last night when you locked me up and I didn't get the right of it. Is this your notion of the third degree? What's the doctor got to do with it?"

"Doctor Allen is the coroner, Dennis!" McCarty shot him a desperately warning glance. "I found the body of a woman murdered with a boat-hook, it looked like, and the constable, here, found me and because there was nobody else around I'm charged with it, as far as I can make out, and you're held with being an accessory before the fact——"

"By the keys of Saint Peter!" Dennis gasped, and then to his companion's consternation he gave unmistakable signs of ill-suppressed mirth. "You, Mac! It had to be you that would find it! People could live on a sand-dump like this forever and run across nothing more exciting than a dead crab, maybe, but you get shipwrecked and washed up in the midst of a murder case!"

"Funny, hain't it?" the constable remarked dryly. "'Peared kind o' that way to me, too, an' that's why I nabbed y'r friend. He wasn't laughin', though, when he set thar starin' at the blood on his hands last night!"

"Oh, for the love of heaven!" McCarty exclaimed, exasperated beyond measure. "The blood was from the

cut on my own head, that had opened again in the heat of the cabin.—I suppose I got right up after lamming my head on that rock and walked miles over those sand hills straight through the dark and the storm to a cabin I didn't know was there, till I'd got within twenty feet of it! Then maybe I went in and fought with a woman that never I'd laid eyes on before, and killed her, and set fire to the shanty, and beat it after fastening up the door some way behind me!—'Tis likely I'd come back again and kick in the door and put out the fire and then light the lantern and sit down at my ease to wait for you!—How long have you been on the force?"

"I be'n constubble o' Spindrift Cove for thutty year!" Eb Bartlett responded, stung by the scorn in McCarty's tone. "I'd hev be'n sheriff o' Barnstubble County long ago ef Amasa Hite's brother-in-law didn't own nigh onto half of it!"

"And you sit yawping here after wasting a whole night while the guy that croaked that woman is on his way?" McCarty demanded. He had not noted that Denny's mirth had subsided and that he sat shocked into silence, nor that the little twinkling eyes of the coroner were fixed brightly upon him. All the disgust of the roundsman of other days at the blundering of a green rookie rang in his tones. "You give me a pain!"

The constable shook a long, threatening finger under his nose.

"Y'r insultin' the law!" he shrilled, but the coroner checked him.

"Wait a minute, Eb." He turned to McCarty. "How did you find the cabin at all?"

"Didn't I see the glow of the fire and haze of smoke through the broken window of it, sir?" There was unutterable weariness in McCarty's tone. "Didn't I stamp it out after I'd kicked in the door and saw what was there, and when I'd lighted the lantern to have a look at the body myself before going for help, weren't the fresh shavings and drip of the kerosene trailed all over the floor?"

"Well, then, if we're wasting time, Mister Doe, and I calculate we are, suppose we shorten it by having you tell us just what you do know of this matter from the beginning?" Doctor Allen sat back in his chair and his triple chins sagged to the freshly laundered white tie.

"'Mister——!'" Dennis came out of his trance and his jaw dropped. Then, under a withering glare from his companion, he recovered himself and spoke quickly: "Sure, Mr. Doe doesn't know a bit more about it than me, Doctor!"

"Am I telling it or you, Denny?" McCarty glared once more and then turned back to the coroner. "The first I knew after I crashed into the rock was laying there half in and half out of the water with the thunder and lightning splitting the night all around me, and thinking I was in the next world, sir."

"'Thunder and lightning?'" repeated the coroner with a quick glance towards Constable Bartlett who had been listening in sullen silence. "That didn't start till

past ten o'clock, long after the squall was over.—Go on."

Rapidly, but with a precision that overlooked no detail, McCarty told his story as though once again he were making a report to the Inspector, and when he had finished with the description of his own discovery and arrest, the three other men sat for a moment without speaking. Then the constable heaved a mighty sigh.

"Wal, I calc'late I was wrong, Doc. Mebbe I'm a fool, but I ain't too big a one to admit it, leastways to anybody but the sheriff! 'Peered like a sure case to me but the evidence has kind o' petered out.—What say?"

He rose, jingling his keys tentatively, and at a slow, decisive nod from the coroner he unlocked the old-fashioned handcuffs of his two prisoners.

"Thanks, Constable," said McCarty. "'Tis small wonder you thought it was me that did it, finding me with the body and all! If the wits hadn't been knocked clean out of me by that slam I got against the rock, I'd have grabbed the lantern and gone for help the minute I saw what had happened instead of sitting down like a great boob to try to think it out for myself! What time was it you found me there?"

"'Round half past twelve." The constable had seated himself once more, and there was a weary, dispirited droop to his sagging shoulders.

"Well, I was still dazed-like, as I say, so I can't be just accurate, but I couldn't have been there more than fifteen or twenty minutes before you came. If the dory was wrecked at nine and the thunder-storm didn't come up till after ten, I must have been unconscious for over

an hour and then taken two more to give up hunting for Denny and stumble to where that shanty stands." McCarty shrugged. "That's nothing to do with it, though. We're out of it now, but I suppose we're held for the inquest?"

The coroner nodded.

"Just to appear, that's all, as witnesses. You're free till then. I'm calling it for the day after to-morrow, so you won't lose much time from your fishing; unless this has kind o' spoiled your vacation for you and you figger on giving it up and going straight back to New York."

"How did you know we come from there?" Dennis' eyes widened.

"The new Bedford local gets in at Plimptonport at four o'clock." Doctor Allen chuckled. "You two don't come from anywheres Down East, that's easy to tell, and I calculated that if you had taken the night boat up from New York Sunday you'd just about have had time for a look around New Bedford and to ask about fishing points along the south shore of the Cape."

"'Time!'" Dennis repeated bitterly. "We'd hours on our hands and yet Mac could not remember about his cigars till we got to Plimptonport! That's all he could think of, then, after he'd found out there wasn't a decent smoke in the place; he gave me no chance to look up a better boat, or bargain proper with that old codger for the rent of his shack and his rotten tub! Nothing would do but we must find what was the nearest town that sold real tobacco and get there if we had to swim. That's why we started so late in the afternoon."

McCarty had wondered why the two local officials seemed still inclined to talk rather than set about their delayed investigation and he was on the point of dismissing it from his thoughts, in disgust at the way the whole affair was being conducted. But now he detected that some deeper motive underlay this apparently aimless attention to Denny's garrulity, for the coroner's geniality seemed all at once a trifle strained as he asked with another chuckle:

"Why didn't you tell Captain Griscom this, and where you were bound for when he picked you up?"

"Because I could not pronounce the heathen name of the place and I can't yet!" confessed Dennis. "It comes to me now that 'twas Matta-something, but I could think of nothing last night except that Mac, here, was lost."

The constable cleared his throat.

"Be you two kin to each other?"

"No. Just old friends." McCarty thought it best to take a hand once more in the conversation. "Since Denny sold out his shop and I retired from my own business we've taken many a little trip together, the both of us being bachelors, but we never started one with a night in jail before!—Is there a hotel or boarding-place in Spindrift Cove where we can stay till after the inquest?"

"I calc'late mebbe Mis' Griscom'll 'commodate ye. We don't git no travelin' men here an' not enough summer boarders come to make it wuth while f'r Ike to build up the huttel again after it burned down." A dull, hopeless look had come into the constable's faded eyes, such

as McCarty had often seen in the eyes of men on the force when they had come to an apathetic acceptance of defeat. "Ye'll hev to speak quick, though; this here inquest'll bring a hull passel o' folks from all over the Cape an' even down from Boston—an' the verdict'll be the same as it was in the last case eight year ago! 'Unknown!'"

"It's too bad." McCarty glanced blandly at Dennis and then away in haste, for the latter's eyes had been fixed upon him with a light of dawning comprehension mingled with such eager expectancy that it all but disconcerted him. Denny was on to his reason for remaining incognito! He was ready and waiting for the old partnership to be renewed! "After the experience we had yesterday, what with the storm and all, I'm thinking we've had enough of the water for a day or two and that murder is mighty interesting, especially since it was me first found the woman. I'd like to have poked around a bit with Denny here and had a look into it just out of curiosity and I know you wouldn't have minded, nor the coroner either, but now that the sheriff's coming I don't suppose he'll give us a chance. There's a rare story to be read from the signs in that cabin and from the poor creature's body, too, if one had the eyes to see them!"

"Seems to me that you summed it all up pretty neatly yourself, Mister Doe," the coroner observed. "Eb and I went all over every inch of it after we got the body up to my house and we didn't find out anything more than what you've said. Somebody fought with the woman

and killed her and set fire to the cabin and got away. That's all there is to it yet."

McCarty suppressed a groan.

"Haven't you discovered anything about either of them?" he demanded.

"No, but it's bound to come out who the woman is." Doctor Allen's tone was one of easy assumption, and he clasped his hands comfortably over his rotund stomach as he tilted back his chair. "Strangers ain't so plentiful around here that she wouldn't have been noticed and she couldn't have come far in those clothes."

A vivid flash of memory McCarty visualized the body as it had lain before him and for the first time the incongruity of its apparel was borne in upon him.

"Why did she come in such a hurry, or secretly, or else after changing her mind at the last minute?" he asked. "How did she get there—fly? I don't know the lay of that cabin, but 'twas not over the sands she walked! The one that killed her lives either within a stone's throw or miles away, not in between, and something else happened in or around that place right after they made their getaway and an hour or more before I reached there. They weren't either of them used to hard labor, not of a practical kind——"

"Holt y'r hosses, Mister!" the constable gasped. He had risen to his feet, and the coroner was leaning forward, his beady eyes shining and flabby cheeks puffing out with each quickened breath. "Ye never see all that, half-stunned as ye be! That old cabin's on Mr. Thompson's waterfront 'way off from everything with nothin'

but sand an' salt marshes all 'round it an' it hain't be'n lived in since Zenas Newcombe was lost in the big storm last year. He was thar when Mr. Thompson bought the place an' he let him stay on rent free though old Zenas had otter be'n sent to the poor farm long before. How c'd ye tell the murd'rer lived nigh or far, or that the woman come in a hurry, or that they wasn't used to work? It must've be'n that crack ye got on the head made ye think up all them things!"

"I could prove them to you in five minutes if I saw the body and the inside of the cabin again," McCarty suggested craftily. "It was all there as plain as the nose on your face, and a lot more besides."

"Prove it to us and I'll see that the sheriff leaves you alone to look around as much as you've a mind to!" Doctor Allen rose on his short, stubby legs with an air of decision. "I've got my own investigation to make independent of his and though Eb's got to take his orders from Amasa Hite soon's he gets here there's no love lost between them, as mebbe you've guessed. We'd like to show Barnstable folks that the Cove doesn't need their help just once, wouldn't we, Eb?"

"Ye can bet we would!" the constable assented, his dulled eyes beginning to glisten, but he tugged somewhat skeptically at his beard. "Thar be'n no mortal eye c'd see all that, let alone that anythin' *else* had happened 'round that cabin after the murd'rer left! What kind o' a thing was it, Mister?"

"Something that shook it to its foundations, if it's got any," McCarty responded briefly. "Of course if

Denny and me should happen to find out anything more that mightn't have struck you we'll come to you or the coroner with it, since you're good enough to let us snoop around, but nobody else must get on to it, understand? To the rest of the town we'll just be those two boob fishermen that got wrecked out of Plimptonport and have nothing better to do while they wait for the inquest than mix themselves up in other people's business. It's true enough, at that, but if people thought that outsiders like us were trying to butt into the real investigation they wouldn't give us a tumble. Get me?"

"Come along." Doctor Allen picked up his hat from the table and started for the door. "We'll stop at Capt'n Griscom's first so's you can arrange with Mis' Griscom about your board and then I'll take you over to my office. It's in a wing off my house and I've got the body there. Afterwards we can go on down to old Zena's cabin."

He waddled out into the entry and the constable strode after him, but Dennis drew McCarty back for a moment.

"I knew you couldn't keep out of it!" he exulted under his breath. "You'd not keep out of a job long, Mac, if you had to come to the back of beyond to find it!"

"There's more in it than you think, Denny. Why were they suspicious of us even after they took the bracelets off, wanting to know where we came from and all about us, and whether we both had the same story about starting from Plimptonport to Mattagansett last night for tobacco?" McCarty replied in a hurried whisper. "'Twas not about the murder, but there's

something else doing. In a quiet little fishing village like this they're all up before it's light in the morning and in bed by dark. If that old cabin is away off from everything and deserted besides, why was the constable prowling around it at midnight?"

CHAPTER V

THE COMING OF YOUNG HATHERLY

IN the wide, old-fashioned entry of the converted jail McCarty and Dennis, hurrying after the two rural officials, found them in conversation with a tall individual of picturesque appearance. He was a man of about forty in a rough, tweed pedestrian suit, with a short, well-trimmed Van Dyke beard, and a cap pushed far back upon brown hair turning gray at the temples. A handsome, meerschaum pipe was between his teeth and a great setter crouched at his feet.

"Here's Mr. Thompson now," the coroner announced, and, indicating McCarty, he added: "This is the man we have been detaining here because he was found trespassing on your property last night, Mr. Thompson, but we found that we'd made a mistake. Mr. Doe and his friend here, Mr. Riordan, were upset in that squall offshore."

Thompson nodded pleasantly to the two.

"I was talking to Captain Griscom a little while ago and he told me. You were both fortunate in escaping so easily." He smiled and then his face grew grave. "Someone else who trespassed on my place earlier than

you met a frightful end, I understand. I am inexpressibly shocked! It doesn't seem possible that such a tragedy should have occurred so near my house without my having heard something—a scream, or——!"

He broke off with a fastidious shudder which did not seem out of place despite his rugged appearance, and began to pull at the setter's silky ears with his long, slender, nervous fingers.

"You live near that shack, then, sir?" McCarty asked respectfully. "It's a wonder I didn't find your house when I was floundering around on those sand hills in the storm."

"Oh, the dunes are on the farther side of the cabin, the direction from which you came if you were swept up on the beach approximately near where Captain Griscom thinks," replied Thompson. "I live right on the shore, too, but nearer the village street, although the house stands much further back.—I shall see that a good, strong light is always left burning in one of the south windows after this, and as soon as your investigation is over, Doctor Allen, I mean to raze that cabin to the ground. I intended to do it after poor old Zenas was drowned, but I left it because it added a picturesque touch to the Point. It is a horror now! I have a morbid feeling of responsibility because the affair happened on property belonging to me and I stopped by to assure you that I'll be glad to do anything I can to further your investigation, and yours also, of course, Constable. Look in on me at any time."

He nodded once more to McCarty and Dennis and de-

scending from the porch strolled off down the street with the setter at his heels.

"Mr. Thompson's not a native here, is he?" McCarty asked the constable. "I think you said he bought his place recently?"

"Two year ago; old Endicott homestead, it was, an' a fine substantial place till he begun puttin' gimcracks on it. Called it 'restorin'' it!" Constable Bartlett snorted. "Them artist fellers with their short pants and their fancy pipes are all a little teched, I calc'late, but Thompson's all right, ef he be a mite soft."

They had crossed the narrow porch and descended to the sidewalk of rough planks. McCarty paused for a minute to glance about him. A charred area beside the jail indicated where the hotel had stood at the corner of a neglected and weed-grown public square or common which formed the inland end of the little street, although a rutted cart-track traversed it to the broad white highway beyond. Across from the site of the burned hotel stood a fair-sized general store with a quaint white meeting-house beside it, and from there down to the blue waters of the Sound, dancing in the bright sunlight of mid-morning, tiny cottages, neatly painted or weather-beaten, but each brave with its patch of old-fashioned garden flowers, elbowed one another for space in a double line.

A few very old men lounged about and a dog or two sprawled listlessly, snapping at flies, but the village for the most part basked, deserted and still. It seemed impossible to believe that violence and crime had entered

here only a few hours before and that people were going about their daily tasks, the women indoors and the men at sea, with no further concern in the matter.

But with their appearance, green shutters at the windows of cottages on both sides of the way were clicking as they turned and here and there a housewife appeared, ostentatiously shaking a broom or emptying a bucket. McCarty smiled to himself; one human element at least, was not lacking.

"Did ever you see such a dead-alive hole?" It was Dennis at his elbow. "The womenfolks are giving us desperate suspects the once-over, but there's nothing else stirring. That fellow Thompson is a city-bred man, all right. I wonder how he ever stuck it out down here for two years!"

"That's Mis' Griscom's over the way with the pineys growin' in the front yard." The constable pointed to a neat yellow cottage a few doors below the meeting-house. "Goin' thar first, Doc?"

"Yes." The coroner led the way and at their approach a stout, placid-faced woman came out upon the porch. "'Morning, Mis' Griscom. Have you room for a couple of friends of mine to stop for a day or two? They've been boarding with Eb Bartlett since last night but it didn't suit them and they decided to make a change."

"Don't blame them a mite!" She laughed and tiny wrinkles crinkled about her eyes, which were as brightly blue as a girl's. "Noah told Eb he was makin' a mistake and I'm real glad he's found it out for himself so soon. 'Course I've got plenty o' room but I'll have to put 'em

in together, 'cause thar's folks comin' from Barnstubble that'll expect to stay with us too."

"That'll be all right, I guess." Doctor Allen introduced them and McCarty remarked:

"It's you we've to thank for our breakfast, I'm thinking, ma'am. It was good of you to send it over and my friend Denny and I sure appreciated it."

"It wasn't nothin' but just doughnuts an' coffee." She spoke deprecatingly, but her eyes were beaming. "So you be the 'Mac' that your friend was near crazy about last night? I'm so glad it was you, after all, that come up on the shore! My man says it was nigh heart-breakin', the way he was callin' an' watchin' by the light o' the lanterns to see what the grapplin' irons would bring up, an' he wouldn't give up hope till they was all wore out! We—that's an old story to us down here on the Cape an' most o' us go through it one time or another but it don't always turn out thataway.—Millie!"

She had turned to the open doorway behind her as though to conceal some unwelcome emotion. Just then a tall, slender, young woman in a pink gingham dress, with the same deep-blue, serene eyes, appeared from the rear of the house.

"Yes, Aunt Charity."

"Git the front spare bedroom ready, child. I'll 'tend to the other two. This here is Mr. Doe who—who was with Mr. Riordan in that dory——"

"Oh!" The girl caught her breath in a little gasp. "We—we all hoped you might turn out to be the friend

he thought was lost!—Mr. Doe, what was she like, that woman there in the cabin?"

She asked the question abruptly almost as if it were forced from her against her will, and McCarty eyed her with newly alert interest.

"Millie ain't naterally inquisitive, but it seems s'ef she can't git that poor critter out o' her mind." Mrs. Griscom spoke apologetically. "I calc'late it's because nothin' like this ever happened right at the doorstep a-fore, so to speak."

"Well, ma'am, I was kind of dazed and I didn't rightly get a look at her," McCarty replied, watching the girl's face. "She was dark and pretty, though not so young as you, if you'll excuse me. I guess by her clothes she came from the city, somewhere."

Millie's wild-rose color seemed to fade a little.

"'Dark and pretty, and from the city,'" she repeated as if to herself, then added quickly: "It's dreadful, isn't it? Nobody knows where she came from or who she was or anything, do they?"

"Not yet, ma'am." It was evident that these good folk had none of them shared the constable's earlier suspicions of himself, and if that was an indication of the general attitude of the village it would be a simple matter to make friends. "I guess they'll know pretty soon, though."

"I—I hope so." Once more there came that little catch in her breath as she turned to her aunt, who had been concluding negotiations for board with Dennis. "I'll

go and get the spare bedroom ready right away, Aunt Charity."

She nodded and went into the house, but as McCarty, after a final word with Mrs. Griscom, followed the others across the street to a little white cottage nearly opposite, he resolved to keep an eye on the girl. There had been something more than morbid curiosity in her questioning, and his replies, vague as they were, had seemed to trouble her, but impersonally. If she had any notion as to who the dead woman might be, it had not yet deepened into actual suspicion.

Doctor Allen mounted the steps of the porch and pushed open the door leading into the wide, cool hall.

"She's in here." He indicated a door at the right. "Now, Mr. Doe, will you show us how you could tell all that you did about her?"

The dead woman was lying on a long table in the darkened room with her hands decently composed over the torn breast, and Dennis, accustomed as he was to these excursions into criminal investigation with McCarty, shuddered and muttered an exclamation beneath his breath as the doctor drew down the cloth which covered the still form.

"You said she went thar in a hurry, or secretly, or else just through changing her mind quick about somethin'." Even the constable's nasal voice had lowered. "Did ye opine that from her looks or what else you see in the cabin?"

"From her clothes," McCarty responded. "I'm not much up on women's style but when they wear a fancy

black lace dress like that it's usually in the evening and they put a light kind of a cape or something over it if they're going out, not a heavy, rough coat that's fit for traveling or outdoor sports; that is, not unless they dress for the evening first and then cover it up with a coat that will hide it or maybe that they'll need for where they're going."

"You mean——?" The coroner paused.

"That if the woman wanted to slip away from wherever she was so as to keep an appointment and not have the people there know she'd been gone, taking the time into consideration, she might have dressed for dinner and then put on the coat and the veil and the rough, stout shoes knowing she would have heavy going getting to that shack, if that's where she was headed at first, and yet take them off in a minute when she got back and no one the wiser. If she'd decided not to go and then changed her mind when it was too late to change her clothes the same would apply, and if she'd gone in a hurry she would have grabbed up the first things handy that would be thick and warm enough."

"Seems likely," the constable remarked thoughtfully. "But what made you think she didn't walk over the sand to get to that cabin, when there's nothin' else all 'round it?"

"Look at her shoes, man!" McCarty pointed. "They're made for walking in all weather and to shed dampness, so the rain wouldn't hurt them, but nothing sticks like wet sand, especially in that ridge between the sole and the upper. There's no way to get rid of it

except to let it dry and then brush it off, but do you see a single grain of it on either of her shoes?"

"I never thought of that!" Doctor Allen shook his head. "It would be plain ridiculous to suppose that the murderer might have cleaned them after she was dead if it was meant to burn her up with the cabin, and anyway nobody would stop at such a time to figger on a detail like that."

"But she *must* a-walked, there hain't no two ways about it!" Eb Bartlett asserted stubbornly. "Mebbe she carried her shoes in her hand an' put them on when she got to the cabin?"

"I've had 'em off," the coroner said briefly. "There isn't a speck of sand on her stockings, either, and wet sand sticks, as Mr. Doe says; she couldn't have brushed it all away. What's your idea?"

He turned to McCarty but the latter shrugged.

"I haven't any. Remember I haven't seen the outside of that shack yet in daylight, and I didn't try to say how she got there. I did say, though, that she wasn't used to hard practical labor, for if she was it would have showed in her face, to say nothing of the condition of her hands. One of them looks as though she'd hurt it, for its swollen a little, but that was in the struggle with the murderer, maybe. Both of them are soft and small and delicate, though, with pointed fingers and nails that were well taken care of; they never saw a real day's work in her life."

"I don't see why that idee didn't come to us." Bartlett

looked almost accusingly at his brother official. "Anybody could tell that; it's as plain as day!"

"If one has the eyes to see it, Eb," the coroner remarked. "That's what Mr. Doe said himself, if you recollect, and he's showed that he knows what he's talking about.—But how did you know the murderer wasn't used to work either, and that something happened after he'd got away and before you came?"

"I'll have to show you that in the shack itself," McCarty responded.

"Then let's go straight-away." Dr. Allen drew the cloth once more over the body and turned to the door. "We want to find out all we can before the sheriff gets here."

As they came out into the sunlight of the porch again, Eb Bartlett glanced up the street and exclaimed:

"Thar's that 'Buck' Hatherly comin' in his ottermobile as though all tarnation was after him!"

A long, low-swung gray motor car with a single, goggled occupant was careening recklessly across the rutted road of the common, plowing up the sandy soil in its wake.

"He was fined last summer an' I warned him twice a-ready this year 'gainst speedin'; the next time it'll mean jail, if he be a Hatherly, an' I reckon I've got him now!" the constable continued with evident satisfaction. "City folks think they c'n come down here an' do 'bout as they please.—Great Jehoshaphat, look at him come a-hummin'!"

The car seemed, indeed, fairly to spurn the ground as it spurted madly toward them, and all at once the coroner spoke:

"Young Hatherly's not doing that for fun this time, Eb. He must be bringing news.—There, he's slowing down."

"He'd better, afore he hits the loose sand or he'll go clear through that windshield!" Bartlett retorted grimly. "Comin' to the store, I reckon. I'll l'arn him yet to respect the laws——!"

The car had slowed but they could hear its powerful humming as it came to a jarring halt and then suddenly sprinted forward.

"That wasn't the store, it was the jail he headed for—he's seen us, he's coming on!" The doctor hurried down the steps of the porch with the constable at his heels, but McCarty and Dennis waited in the doorway. "Mebbe somebody's sick!"

The occupant of the car waved as he shot past, then turned in a shower of sand to come to a final stop before them.

"'Morning, Mr. Hatherly." Doctor Allen waddled hastily forward. "Something wrong at your folks'?"

"Yes." The young man tore off his goggled cap as he sprang from behind the wheel, revealing a mop of vivid, red hair with an irrepressible wave in it and a clean-cut face that was white and drawn beneath its coating of freckles. "We didn't know—we've just heard that there was a murder committed here last night down on the shore. Is—is it true, Doctor?"

"Yes. A young woman, a stranger." The coroner nodded toward the wing of the cottage. "I've got her in there. Do you folks know of anybody that's missing?"

"'A young woman!'" repeated 'Buck' Hatherly as though he had not heard the question. His hazel eyes followed the direction of the other's nod and then came swiftly back to his face. "What does she look like, Doctor?"

"Handsome, I should say, when she was alive. Big brown eyes, darker than yours, long, brown hair, fine, full figger. Looked to be about thirty or mebbe a little older. Do you know anybody that would describe?"

"It's a little vague, isn't it?" He passed a shaking hand across his forehead. "Lots of young women have brown eyes and hair——"

"Look a-here, Mr. Hatherly." The constable stepped forward. "Ef anybody's missin', say so! This hain't no time for tomfoolery! Thar's be'n murder done an' we want to git at the truth!"

"Well, I can't say that any one is actually missing, but a young woman who—who might answer that description has gone away suddenly without—without leaving any word," the young man stammered reluctantly. "Of course, Constable, if she comes back and finds that her name has been dragged into a murder case it will be very distressing——!"

"Be a mite more distressin' ef she don't come back a-tall, though, won't it?" the other interrupted dryly.

Buck Hatherly nodded and looked him in the eyes.

"That's why I'm here; to make sure," he replied. "Of

course, we—none of her friends—believe that she could have been decoyed down to the shore, and we can't understand what she might have been doing in or near Spindrift Cove, but since she has disappeared like this——!"

"Mebbe you'd better come in and have a look at the body for yourself, Mr. Hatherly," suggested the coroner. "You're a friend of this young woman, you say?"

"An acquaintance. I should know her at once, of course, if——" His voice had grown suddenly hoarse and he left the sentence unfinished. Then he threw back his broad shoulders. "You are right, Doctor; I had better see for myself. If it isn't the young woman I mean, there will be no harm done, but if it should be, the sooner we all know it the better."

"Come right in, then." Doctor Allen led the way once more up the steps of the porch. "The constable can come in with us, of course, but my two friends won't mind waiting here.—I'll leave the room door a little open; you might like to hear what goes on."

He added the last in a quick undertone to McCarty when young Hatherly and the constable had passed him, then hastened after them toward the wing.

"There's a good head on top of all that fat, Mac!" Dennis remarked approvingly. "The lad looked as if he was marching through the little green door to the chair itself!"

"You didn't look so cheerful in there awhile back, and the Lord knows what wild rumors may have been

flying around the countryside. He may think she's in pieces, entirely!—Hush, now!"

"Just a minute," the coroner was saying as he ushered the others into the little room. "It's a mite dark, coming in here from the sunshine. The body is right over this way.—Now, Mr. Hatherly?"

To the eavesdroppers outside, it seemed that the pause which followed was almost interminable, but it was broken at last by a low exclamation of horror.

"My God! It is she! It is Josetta Wall!"

CHAPTER VI

A CAREFULLY TOLD STORY

DENNIS had gripped McCarty's arm in a convulsive grasp but he said nothing as the coroner's voice came again, sharp and authoritative this time.

"It is the young woman you were looking for, Mr. Hatherly? You identify her?"

"Yes!—There's no question of doubt. This is horrible, ghastly! Get me out of here!"

"We'll just go into my office and you can tell us what you know of the young woman, then.—Lead the way, Eb."

The constable reappeared and crossed the hall to a door at the opposite side, followed by young Hatherly, who stumbled as though blindness had suddenly come upon him. Doctor Allen brought up the rear and beckoned to McCarty and Dennis.

"What do you think of that? He's identified her! I told you it was bound to be found out soon! You'll learn all about it at the inquest, of course, but if you've a mind to, you can come into the office with us now and hear what he's got to say."

They were only too eager to avail themselves of his

invitation and followed him into a large room which outside of office hours was quite evidently the family parlor as well. Carved, walnut cabinets and what-nots filled with souvenirs of an older, seafaring day were scattered between medical chests and cupboards, and a stand of first-aid supplies was placed before an antiquated, square piano. On a haircloth sofa between the windows young Hatherly sat limply, his hands hanging between his knees and his eyes, darkened now, staring straight before him, while the constable ranged restlessly up and down upon the cold hearth.

"Mr. Hatherly, Mr. Doe, here, found the body of the deceased last night and he and his friend would like to hear what you have to tell us."

Hatherly glanced up at the coroner and then at the two who accompanied him, but it was doubtful if he was aware of their presence, although he nodded vaguely. A violent shudder or two shook him but he betrayed no other sign of emotion to McCarty's eyes as they seated themselves in the chairs indicated by their host.

"You identify the deceased as a woman named Josetta Wall? Who was she, Mr. Hatherly?"

"A guest of ours at Hatherly House," the young man replied dully. "A friend of my brother and sister-in-law."

"How long has she been there?"

"For about ten days, I think." Hatherly seemed to be attempting with an effort to pull his wits together. "Yes, she arrived a week ago last Saturday."

"Where is she from?"

"Philadelphia, I believe, but my sister-in-law met Mrs. Wall down South last winter. Really, you must ask her——"

"Mrs. Wall?" The coroner glanced at the constable and then at McCarty. There had been no wedding ring upon the dead woman's finger. "Where is her husband?"

"She was a widow. I never heard her speak of her husband. I met her only ten days ago when she came to visit us—Really, Doctor, I can tell you very little about her! It is awful, incredible! I cannot realize it even after seeing her in there! Until half an hour ago we supposed her to be in her room." He shuddered again and his hands clenched and unclenched nervously. "She knew no one down here at least on this section of the Cape, and why she should have wandered away from the house——?"

Hatherly paused as though unable to continue, and the coroner asked:

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

"Yesterday afternoon. She complained of having a headache then and didn't appear at dinner or during the evening." He started up. "Great heavens, I must telephone to my sister-in-law! She is waiting to hear!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Hatherly. When was the first you heard of the murder?"

"This morning. It was late when I came down to breakfast and my brother had already started for Boston, but afterwards one of the gardeners told me. He didn't know any of the details, however, only just that a murder

had been committed in one of the fishermen's huts down on the shore, and I wasn't interested." He paused again, moistening his lips nervously, and then went on: "When Mrs. Wall didn't come down to breakfast, or ring, my sister-in-law supposed she was sleeping late on account of her headache and would not have her disturbed, but as it got on toward noon she grew worried and finally sent one of the maids up to knock on her door. Just then the butcher drove in and he had a little more detailed news. He said a strange woman had been lured down to the sand in the storm and killed and robbed. Even that didn't mean anything to me, I mean that I didn't for an instant connect it with Mrs. Wall, but when I re-entered the house —I had gone out the side door to speak to the butcher— my sister-in-law met me with the news that the maid had been unable to get any reply from Mrs. Wall, had found the door locked and had looked through the key-hole. She hadn't been able to see anyone in the room and my sister-in-law was greatly worried. Finally we went up together and after she had knocked and called repeatedly I broke the door down. The bed had not been disturbed and the room was empty!"

"Wasn't thar no note, nor nothin'?" the constable demanded.

"None. My sister-in-law and I didn't know what to think and then suddenly I remembered what I had heard about the murder. I didn't like to speak of it to her—you know, Doctor, what a nervous, excitable, little thing she is,—and I scouted the idea that it could be Mrs. Wall, but there was the empty room and no explanation.—There

isn't any explanation still!" he added desperately. "Unless she skipped out for a walk because of her headache and the storm came up and she lost her way, and then encountered some maniac!"

"You finally mentioned the murder to Mrs. Hatherly?" the coroner prompted.

"Yes, and she immediately threatened hysterics and urged me to drive down here as quickly as I could and see you, Doctor. Of course I had to be careful about dragging Mrs. Wall's name into this while there was the possibility that she had left the house suddenly for some reason of her own and would return later or write and explain, but the matter was too grave for delay. Doctor, I must telephone to my sister-in-law, or drive home at once and break the news to her!"

"Telephone of course, if you like, Mr. Hatherly." The coroner waved toward the old-fashioned instrument in the corner. "I'll be over to your house later to take charge of Mrs. Wall's effects, until the inquest, at least. That'll have to be held at your house, too, on Thursday morning."

"Of course; anything you say, Doctor." Young Hatherly went to the telephone but hesitated before he rang the bell. "I'd better call up the telegraph office at Plimptonport, too, if you don't mind, and send a wire to my brother Bill to return at once. I don't know whom to notify about Mrs. Wall, but my sister-in-law will, of course."

While he was getting his number the constable crossed to the coroner and whispered to him in evident excite-

ment, and Dennis said under his breath to his companion:

"It's odd the lad knows no more about the people his family entertain! What do you think of it, Mac? Does it sound a likely story to you?"

"Wait till we learn what this sister-in-law has to say," McCarty replied in an equally low tone. "Always allowing for it that Mrs. Wall had a little private date of her own to keep last night out in these sand hills he tells a straight enough tale, but he's just a bit too careful about it. Have you noticed? He seems shocked and horrified enough but he pulled himself together quick and he's watching every word he says. Why would he, if he's got nothing to hide?"

"Is that you, Alice?" Young Hatherly spoke into the telephone in a voice which shook uncontrollably. "Yes, Buck. Try not to make a scene, now, but I've got to tell you. It is—what we feared! . . . I do mean it, I've seen her! . . . For God's sake, stop that! You've got to pull yourself together till I can get home. . . . Yes, right away. I'm phoning from Doctor Allen's now. . . . He's coming over later to—to take charge of Mrs. Wall's things. . . . You forget he is the coroner here in Spindrift Cove. Yes, I'll ask him; I ought to have thought of that. . . . No, I can't tell you now, I don't know anything myself, Alice, except what I've seen, they haven't told me. . . . No, I'll attend to that from here. . . . Yes, as soon as I can, and try to brace up, old girl. Don't answer the telephone again or see anyone till I get there. 'Bye."

He rang off and turned to the coroner.

"Doctor, Mrs. Hatherly wants to know if you wouldn't like to drive over to the house at once with me and take charge of things? I should have asked you myself but this frightful affair has bowled me over so that I can't think straight. Will you come?"

"Calc'late I will, if you'll drive a little mite slower than you did getting here!" The coroner rose. "You want to get the telegraph office first, don't you?"

"Yes. Have you and the constable found any trace yet of the murderer?"

Doctor Allen shook his head.

"Nothing definite. I'll tell you all I can on the way over.—Eb, will you take our friends where we intended to go? I'll join you if I get back in time before dinner and if not you'll find me here right afterwards."

"Yep. We'd better be gittin' right along, too." The constable took up his weather-worn felt hat from the top of the piano and then stopped, for young Hatherly was at the telephone once more.

"Yes, that is the right address; now take the message, please.—'Serious trouble cannot explain wire or phone. Return immediately. Alice needs you.' . . . Yes. Signed 'Buck'. . . . That is correct. See that it goes at once, won't you?"

"I ain't trying to drum up trade for myself, but if I know Mrs. Hatherly I calc'late I better take along a little something to quiet her nerves." Doctor Allen crossed to one of the medicine chests and busied himself there for a moment. "You forgot to ask her if you

oughtn't to send a wire to some of Mrs. Wall's folks."

"That's so! I told you this thing had knocked me out!" Hatherly looked chagrined. "We'll be home in ten minutes, though, and I can send what messages she wants for her from the house phone. Ready, Doctor?"

He nodded to the constable and his two companions and with a last shuddering glance across the hall hurried out to his car, but the coroner lingered for a moment.

"Dinner'll be ready at Mis' Griscom's in half an hour, and if you want to see anything that I bring back with me belonging to Mrs. Wall come over as soon as you're through," he said to McCarty. "The sheriff'll likely be here before then but it won't make any difference."

"We'll be here, sir," McCarty promised and then, as the little doctor waddled out quickly and they prepared to follow, he added to the constable: "Who are these Hatherlys?"

"City folks that come out from Boston an' built a gre't big place a couple o' miles back on the highroad a few years ago," Eb Bartlett replied. "Big bugs, I calc'late, for they keep seven in help an' two other ottermobiles besides that scootin' thing young Buck drives, but they don't give themselves no airs, I'll say that much for 'em. Bill, the oldest one, is a stock broker I've heard tell, an' it was his wife Buck was a-talkin' to just now. She's young, an' mighty pretty an' stylish but they do say she gits in the most turr'ble tantrums, sweet as pie one minute an' raisin' all creation the next. There's just the three o' 'em, her an' her husband an' Buck."

"He isn't married then, the lad that was just here?" Dennis asked as they came out on the little porch. The gray car was already speeding across the common.

"No. He's be'n kind o' sparkin' 'round Millie, Mis' Griscom's niece over the way." The constable glanced toward the yellow cottage and McCarty's eyes followed his. For an instant he caught the flash of a pink gingham dress behind the shutters of an upper front window, and then the blinds turned abruptly. If the constable had been equally observing he gave no sign, but turned toward the little strip of beach, and continued: "Millie's a sensible gal, though, an' she knows thar couldn't nothin' serious come o' it, even ef he was steady an' settled, which he never will be! Ef he gits married it'll be to one o' them thar flyaway society women like the kind that comes visitin' to his brother's house. Millie sings in the choir an' teaches school over to Wareham in wintertime; she's savin' up to go to Boston an' study music some day."

"What's the matter with this lad Buck?" The little cottages with their neat gardens had given way to ramshackle, weather-beaten shacks stuck irregularly in the sand, and the waters of the Sound were very close. "Wild, is he?"

"Wild as all git-out! Ye seen him drivin' that thar car? That's the way he does everything. I've heerd tell he run away from college to go to war an' had a chance to git made off'cer but he was too contrary; just went 'long as a buck private, that's where he got his name from. I expect he's made more'n plenty o' talk

for the fam'ly but this here murder's a-goin' to raise a worse to-do than any o' his pranks.—Here we be! Turn to the left. See that cabin beyond the marshes 'way off thar on the Point where the menfolks is standin' 'round? That's it."

McCarty and Dennis paused with one accord to look about them. The little street with its plank sidewalk ended abruptly in the center of a concave crescent of beach, a mere strip of sand, between two out-jutting projections of land, forming a cove which had evidently given the little community its name. A cluster of boats were drawn up above the water line with nets spread out to be mended or to dry in the sun, and here and there a cramped figure in faded garments was bent laboriously over them. To the right the shore swept out in a widened curve, dotted here and there with tumbled-down cabins, but for the most part there were only bare stretches that glistened whitely in the glare, topped by tall, coarse, dun-colored, rippling grasses.

Beyond the huddled shacks immediately at their left the sandy shore was broken at a little distance by a space of vivid green shrubbery with stunted trees lifting brave heads behind it and the tall, brick chimneys of a house showing between; but beyond that the salt marsh thrust a long arm out into the Sound. At its point a little knot of people were moving about a sagging-roofed, gray hut that canted crazily backward from the sea, and Dennis drew a deep breath. He had been obviously uninterested in the constable's remarks about Mrs. Griscom's niece, and the local history of the Hatherly family had left him un-

moved. His labored breathing and the deep furrows on his forehead denoted an unusual concentration of thought, and McCarty wondered, not without some misgiving, what the result would be. When Dennis assumed the initiative in their investigations, the immediate events were apt to be disconcerting.

But when they had plowed through the heavy sand and approached the shack, he appeared to throw off the preoccupation which had settled upon him and gazed with the liveliest curiosity at their surroundings. The bystanders glowered at the newcomers and a muttered undertone of comment ran among them that was not without its hint of menace, but the constable turned and addressed them.

"Look a-here, boys, these here strangers from the city, Mr. Doe and Mr. Riordan, are helpin' Doc Allen an' me in the 'vestigation into this here murder. It's be'n proved that they didn't know nothin' 'bout it but we had to hold 'em till it was proved, though it wasn't ag'in 'em that they got wrecked in the squall an' one o' 'em found this cabin by accident just a few minutes before I come, myself.—These here are my dep'ties." He indicated two raw-boned youths who, obviously impressed with their new importance, had worn a track in the sand about the door. "They're in charge not to let nobody in a-mussin' an' a-meddlin' till the sheriff gits here."

"Hain't nobody wanted to, yit." One of them spoke up. "Calc'late we'll hev our hands full when the news

spreads far 'nough. Kin I go hum to dinner now, Eb? Jonas'll stay till I git back."

The constable nodded his permission and added to his companions:

"Might's well go in; nothin' ain't be'n disturbed after Doc Allen an' me got through last night."

"I want to look at this door first." McCarty paused on the sagging board which served as a step. "I'd like to find out why that door didn't open, when there was nothing but a latch and even that wouldn't give——!"

He halted, for before his eyes in the broad light of day the answer to that question was revealed. Above and below the latch, heavy horizontal pieces of wood, weather-beaten but stout, had been firmly nailed across the door and into the wall, holding it upright, although the hinges upon which it swung were twisted and torn loose. McCarty pointed to it in silence.

"Humph!" Eb Bartlett fingered his whiskers. "Didn't git to notice that afore! 'Tain't no wonder you had to kick the hinges off, Mr. Doe. Wonder when it was done?"

"Last night, of course!" McCarty ejaculated impatiently. "The nails are old and rusted but there are bright spots on them as if they'd been burnished where the hammer or whatever was used to drive them in with glanced off, and there are fresh, new chips out of the wood around them, too. Whoever set fire to the cabin wanted to brace the door well against the strong wind blowing in from the sea and that's why he nailed

on two pieces of wood instead of one, but he had to pound away hit or miss in the dark and I don't believe he had a regular hammer. There don't look to be any stones laying around here big and heavy enough for him to use, even if he could have put his hands on it in a hurry."

He glanced about on the sand, and the gaping onlookers drew back hastily, but only driftwood and fragments of boxes and barrels, relics of the previous night's storm, were scattered high up on the shore. Forcing the door open where the hinges yawned, he entered. With the exception of the absence of the body itself, everything appeared to be just as he and the constable had left it. The lantern which Eb had extinguished before their departure was on the table, one chair overturned beyond it, and the long pole with the hook on its end still protruded from the aperture of the broken window.

The sinister stain on the floor was caked and dark, but the splotches of oil had spread as they soaked into the wood and the shavings, scattered about, reeked with the odor of rank kerosene.

Dennis stepped gingerly to one side where he stood staring round-eyed about him, but the constable turned to McCarty.

"Now, ef you'll tell me how ye knew where the murd'rer lived——?" he began, but the other interrupted him.

"If I knew that I'd go there myself and nab him for you! I said he came either from a good distance away or within a stone's throw, and that was just common

sense. When that pole there fell and broke the window, it let in the rain that kept the little blaze he'd kindled from doing more than smoke up the inside of the place till I got here and stamped it out, didn't it? Well, don't you suppose after he'd nailed up the door behind him and got safe away, he must have been looking for the reflection in the sky that would tell him the shack was burning up and taking with it the evidence of what he'd done? He didn't see it, did he?—Well, if he'd lived far off he wouldn't have dared risk coming back and would have had to let the bets go as they lay, and if his home was close by——" McCarty lowered his voice with a glance toward the door—"if he lived right here in the village he might have seen the glow shining out like I did and waited, hoping every minute that the shack would go up,—and waited too long, till he saw the light of my lantern, maybe, or heard your alarm. If he lived kind of between, though, he would have taken a chance on coming back."

"Sounds reasonable," reflected the constable aloud. "He must a-be'n a desp'rit character, howsomever ye look at it, to wait to start the shack a-fire after what he done —but ye said somethin' else 'bout him, Mr. Doe, that sounds 'sif he wasn't used to soilin' his hands with no rough work."

"I said that he wasn't used to practical labor? I meant the kind that people around here or any other country place do every day." McCarty smiled. "See here!"

He walked around the table to the pile of driftwood

by the stove, and, after pausing for a moment with his back to the others, he took from it two pieces of planking and brought them to the constable.

"Got a jack-knife with you? All right; just whittle a few shavings off this one but be careful not to get them mixed with those on the floor."

Eb Bartlett drew out a huge clasp-knife and opening a long, nicked blade he obeyed, watching the shavings which curled from the outward strokes with the absorbed fascination of one who had never performed such an act before.

"That'll do," said McCarty. "Is that the way you always hold the knife and stick of wood that you're whittling from?"

The constable stared.

"Don't think I'd hold 'em *to'ards* me, do you?" he asked. "Any dumb fool'd know better'n that!"

"If they were used to cutting wood to fashion something out of they would, but not if they weren't," McCarty said. "The guy that cut those shavings on the floor off of this other piece of wood held it *towards* him, for the knife always goes in deeper at the start of your strokes and slivers off at the end of the bit of plank you're holding, as you can see for yourself; but this guy only shaved strips off the middle of his piece and stopped before he got to the end he was pressing against his body. Try it and see."

The constable closed his knife with a click and thrust it back into his pocket.

"No, sirree!" he declared. "I got a-plenty! It's true

as gospel but what beats me is how you thought of it!"

At this moment there came a subdued commotion outside among the group which still lingered and Jonas, the deputy, called shrilly through the door:

"Hey, Eb! Sheriff's comin'!"

CHAPTER VII

THE TORN LABEL

SHERIFF Amasa Hite was a broad, heavily-built man with a light mustache which drooped in straggling wisps to his angular jaw and slaty gray eyes that appeared to focus alternately on the objects of his attention. His massive, slouching shoulders thrust the sagging door aside and the loud, rasping voice seemed to fill the little cabin.

"What ye doin' here, Eb? Thought to find ye at the jail, guardin' them pris'ners o' your'n." There was an unconcealed sneer in his tones.

"I only tuk 'em up on suspicion 'cause I found one o' 'em here in the shack an' the other come over with him from Plimptonport in a dory that got swamped offshore!" the constable retorted hotly. "Soon's they was able for Doc Allen an' me to question 'em we turned 'em loose an' here they be with me; they just wanted to look 'round. Ye tuk your own time gittin' here, 'Masa!"

"Time's my own, I calc'late; that's why I'm sheriff o' this here county." The new arrival hitched up his trousers and squirted a brown jetty of tobacco juice from beneath the drooping mustache. Then he turned his left eye critically on McCarty. "Wanted to look

'round, did they? Wal, they kin look outside; I'm runnin' things now. Doc's holdin' 'em fer the inquest, ain't he?"

Eb Bartlett nodded sullenly.

"They're stoppin' to Griscom's."

"All right. I'll want to talk to you two fellers arter a while." The right eye shifted to Dennis, who replied with disarming smoothness:

"No, sir; that was Mac, there. Captain Griscom hauled me into his boat when our own tub went over. We've your permission to look around outside, then. You see, we have nothing to do until the inquest on the poor lady, Mrs. Wall——"

"Mrs.—*who?*" roared the sheriff.

Out of the tail of his eye Dennis had seen McCarty stooping swiftly over a small keg which stood by the door, and as he loyally sparred for time, a whimsical impulse came to him.

"Oh, didn't you know, Sheriff, who the murdered woman was? Constable Bartlett found that out from the young man whose family she was visiting. I dis-remember his name, but the doctor can likely tell you more when he gets back; he's gone off to get the poor lady's things and find out all about her. The constable had to wait here for you, sir, or I'm thinking he'd have his hands on the murderer by now."

"Come on, Denny; we're in the way here," McCarty said hastily as he straightened. "You'll find us at Captain Griscom's, Sheriff, whenever you want to see us."

He nodded to the constable and went through the doorway, but just outside he halted and glanced about.

The deputy was seated on a pile of driftwood at a safe distance eating his dinner from a basket, and the fishermen were gathered about two strangers, who had evidently arrived with the sheriff.

"I was talking to blarney the constable a bit and give you a minute's time," Dennis explained in a carefully lowered tone. "What was it in the little keg by the door you were monkeying with?"

"These." McCarty disclosed a handful of bent and rusty nails. Selecting one of them, he stepped to the closed side of the door and compared its head with those newly driven into the wood, then measured its length against the thickness of the improvised barricade. At last he turned away with a grunt of satisfaction, motioning for Dennis to follow. "I thought so. The guy took those nails from that keg and likely the pieces of wood from that pile by the stove before ever he left the cabin."

An ear-splitting blast of a horn sounded from one of the shacks at the end of the street as he spoke, and Dennis jumped.

"What in the world——!" The training which had become second nature to him asserted itself. "I wonder where is the fire?"

"'Tis not, you boob!—There goes another one!—It's dinner, Denny, and we'd better be getting back to Mrs. Griscom's."

"You got the lay of things in that cabin pretty well last night, for all your busted head," Dennis observed as they started on their way, but his tone was preoccupied and that unusual furrow of thought had once more

returned to his brow. "We're going back after and have a look outside, didn't you say?"

"I did not," returned McCarty shortly. He knew better than to question Dennis until the latter was ready to give voice to whatever wild theory might have come into his head. "When the sheriff gets through there we can go over the ground but the more we keep out of his way the better. If he gets an idea that we're too interested he may run us in again on suspicion, on his own account. The coroner's all right but he's only the Big Boy until after the inquest and then he steps out of the box except to give medical evidence later, maybe, and the sheriff has his innings. Did you lamp the two guys back there? They must have come with him in one of those flivvers parked up the street."

The little village had taken on a changed look already, for in addition to the cars of all sizes grouped about the jail and the common, quite a crowd of people had collected on the narrow sidewalks and in dooryards and a general air of suppressed excitement prevailed.

Mrs. Griscom's porch was empty as they ascended the steps but she met them at the door.

"Your room's just at the head o' the stairs, ef you want to wash up," she announced. "Soon's you're ready, come out to the kitchen. I'm just dishin' up dinner."

Mindful for the first time of their appearance after the ignominious night in jail, McCarty and Dennis made themselves as presentable as possible and descended to the kitchen at the rear of the cottage. A long table covered with a red cloth stood in the center of the room

and Mrs. Griscom and two strange men were seated near one end, while Millie moved about the stove.

"Come right in an' draw out them chairs," Mrs. Griscom invited. "This is Oren Prouty an' Quincy Alden from Barnstubble. Mr. Prouty's here to git the news for a big Boston paper an' Mr. Alden is c'nnected with the district attorney's office."

Mr. Prouty looked distinctly annoyed and Mr. Alden inflated his chest until the wide lavender stripes in his shirt threatened to split, but McCarty spoke first.

"It's glad I am to meet you!" he said cordially. "We'd like fine to get a story about ourselves in a city paper, with headlines and maybe our pictures and all, wouldn't we, Denny? 'Twould be great to send to our friends at home."

Prouty's sharp-featured face brightened expectantly and he coughed.

"I don't know about the pictures, but I'll see what I can do for you——?" he began condescendingly. McCarty sighed and shook his head, glancing meaningly at Dennis the while.

"More's the pity! We're not allowed to open our mouths till after the inquest, are we, Denny? Coroner's orders."

"That's right," Dennis affirmed lugubriously, but his eyes twinkled. "It's back into jail we'll be clapped if we do. 'Tis too bad you didn't get here before."

"The wires were down between here and Barnstable." It was the man from the district attorney's office, Mr. Alden, who replied. The other had given his attention

once more to his dinner but there was a determination in his manner that made McCarty resolve to keep an eye on the too-loquacious Dennis, despite the latter's good intentions. "That electric storm last night did a heap of damage all along the Cape. Our office and the sheriff's only got word a short time ago of what had happened here."

"Anybody sick over to the Hatherlys?" Mrs. Griscom inquired as Millie finished serving them and took a chair at the table. "We see young Mr. Hatherly drive up to the doctor's in a tearin' hurry while you was there."

"The young gentleman that came in the car?" McCarty shook his head again, conscious that the girl's eyes were regarding him steadily. "Doctor Allen saw him in his office, ma'am; I don't know."

Millie started to speak but checked herself, and during the remainder of the meal Mrs. Griscom and Alden kept up the main part of the conversation. When it was concluded. McCarty maneuvered so as to be the last of the guests to leave the kitchen, and as he stepped out into the hall he felt a light touch upon his arm. Turning, he beheld the young girl. The color was coming and going in her cheeks and her breath came in little gasps.

"Excuse me." She glanced quickly over her shoulder to the kitchen where her aunt was busily moving about, and went on rapidly: "You didn't want to speak before the man who is here to write things up for the papers, of course, but—but I saw the doctor drive away with Mr. Hatherly, and I thought——!"

"There isn't any one sick at his house that I know of, Miss Millie," he replied gravely. "Somebody from there is dead, though. It'll be all over the place in an hour, so there's no harm in my telling you."

The girl closed her eyes for an instant and her very lips paled. Then she forced herself to look up at him.

"Who—who is dead?" she whispered.

"A lady who was visiting there, a Mrs. Wall. It was her found murdered in the cabin last night, though I hope you'll say nothing to anybody till the sheriff or the coroner himself gives it out."

"How—awful!" Millie said slowly. "Do they know how she got there or—or what happened?"

"I don't know that myself, Miss. They only told me her name." McCarty moved a step and her hand fell limply from his arm. "You'll say nothing about it?"

"No. I won't say anything," she promised. "It must be terrible for all of them. Thank you for telling me."

She turned to go back into the kitchen and McCarty proceeded to the porch where he found Dennis, as he had feared, deep in a dramatic and highly colored recital of his rescue to the sharp-faced newspaper correspondent. Dragging him ruthlessly away, he led him across the street toward Doctor Allen's cottage.

"I was only giving him an earful about the wreck of the dory!" Dennis protested.

"And do you think the Boston papers are going to get out extras because of two old fools like us being picked up in a squall?" McCarty demanded witheringly. "He

spotted you as a come-on for dope for his murder story the minute he laid eyes on us at the table and he was only letting you run on to get you warmed up to his subject. Think shame to yourself, Denny, that's dodged the boys of the press in New York all these years, letting a hick reporter make a mark of you!"

"Hick or no, there'll be nobody make a mark of me!" retorted Dennis darkly. "Speaking of marks, who paid sixty dollars for that tub that turned over with us? I'm going out to Plimptonport for our bags this afternoon and if that old pirate gives me any of his lip——!"

"You're going to the coroner's now," interrupted his companion. "I looked out through the entry as we were coming downstairs before dinner and I saw him getting out of a car—not the same one young Hatherly drove, but another—right at his door, and he had a suitcase with him. You may need a shave and a clean shirt, but we're going to hear what he found out about the dead woman first!"

The front door was ajar and McCarty pushed it open inquiringly. No one was visible, but the sheriff's rasping tones sounded from the room in which the body lay, so they tiptoed hurriedly into the office and closed the door.

"Is that the suitcase he was carrying?" Dennis pointed to a week-end bag of black walrus leather, which stood beside the piano. "That couldn't be all she had with her for a ten-days' visit!"

McCarty stooped and examined it.

"Mounted in silver and 'J. W.' in little square silver

letters up by the handle," he commented. "Look at the hotel labels on the sides, Denny! Mrs. Wall must have been some traveler!"

"London, and Paris, and Nice, and what's this 'Biar—' something?" Dennis shook his head. "Think of her ending her days in a lonely shanty down here on the sand, and murdered, too!—What are you looking at, Mac?"

"They're not fresh labels, at least they've been on some months, anyway, and the bag itself has seen more than a little wear," McCarty ruminated. "Here's a place where one of them has been scratched off, and not long ago, for the cuts in the leather are new. There's wide scrapes and then little sharp digs as though whoever wanted it off got impatient with whatever they were using and took a hatpin or something. I wonder why that one label is gone and the rest left?"

"There's a yellow one half gone from this end, too," announced Dennis. "It might have been torn off by accident, though. Look—'n's Express', and then on the next line 'esboro,' and below that 'hire.' Nearly everybody has torn labels sticking to their baggage, though, Mac; it don't mean anything."

"That label was torn almost in half when another that was pasted over it was removed; the paper of it's fresh, though it has been on a good while, and it's all covered with glue.—There, the sheriff's going, thanks be!"

The door across the hall opened and closed and the voices of Amasa Hite and the coroner were audible as

they proceeded towards the front of the cottage. Dennis reconnoitered cautiously.

"They're talking by the door," he whispered. "The sheriff looks kind of mad about something and the little doctor is smiling.—There, he's off, now."

He left the office door open and the two seated themselves as Doctor Allen came down the hall, paused in surprise, and then entered.

"I thought I heard someone come in but I wasn't sure." He nodded. "No, sit down again. That was the sheriff just here; Eb says you met him down at the cabin before dinner."

"He wasn't over-pleased to find us there," McCarty remarked. "He ordered us out of the shack and you should have seen the black look of him when he heard that the poor soul in there had already been identified!"

The coroner chuckled and rubbed his pudgy hands together.

"Yes. I calc'late he thinks we all stole kind of a march on him this time." Then his face sobered. "I don't know as we have, though. We know her name but that's about all I've been able to find out, and until the news is published and some of her folks come forward to claim her body and estate it looks as though she would be as much of a mystery as ever!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN IN THE CAR

"'A MYSTERY!'" Dennis repeated, his eyes widening. "Don't even Mrs. Hatherly know who she is, and her there for a visit?"

"She don't appear to. I never see such a woman!" He shook his head. "Off and on, they've called me in ever since they began coming here summers, when they had colds and such, but mostly it was for Mis' Hatherly's nerves. She's high-strung and I figgered she'd been petted and spoiled and made a lot over all her life just the way her husband treats her now but I never heard tell of anybody carrying their whims so far! It seems she's in the habit of taking up with people if they happen to amuse her without knowing hardly anything about 'em and caring less. Buck Hatherly told me about that going over to the house but I didn't hardly sense it till I'd talked with her. Boston folks don't have any truck with strangers unless they know who their families were 'way back but Mis' Hatherly wasn't a Boston girl herself and I calc'late she looks at things kind of different. She don't know anything about Mis' Wall's husband except that his given name was 'Francis,' nor where she was born, nor if she has a relation in the world!"

McCarty and Dennis looked at each other and then the former remarked:

"Maybe Mrs. Hatherly was too upset, like, to tell you much, Doctor, and 'twould be small wonder!"

"She was in hysterics when we got there but I quieted her down and we made her come up to her own sitting-room where the help wouldn't hear. It appears that about two weeks ago Mis' Wall wrote to her from Boston, from the Louvain Hotel where she was stopping; seems as though she'd been going around to gay summer places till she was all tuckered out and Mis' Hatherly invited her to come down here for a rest."

"It's a rest she'll be getting now, the poor creature!" Dennis shivered. "It's queer they didn't none of them think to see was she in her room last night."

"She'd had a headache all the afternoon—recollect Buck said that, too?—and 'long about six o'clock she sent word to Mis' Hatherly's room by the chambermaid —housemaid, they call her—that she couldn't eat any dinner and wouldn't come to the table but she'd be down later if she felt better; that they weren't to bother about her a-tall, all she needed was quiet. Of course after a hint like that Mis' Hatherly didn't bother her. She and her husband had their dinner and set around a spell but Mis' Wall didn't come down. Then the thunderstorm started,—Mis' Hatherly always has a regular fit in 'em and I calc'late her husband had his hands full with her till the worst of it passed over and he could coax her to go to bed. She knocked at Mis' Wall's door on the way to her own room but not getting any answer thought

she was asleep. This morning it was just as Buck Hatherly told us; she wouldn't have Mis' Wall disturbed till it was getting on to noon and then sent her own maid, Jeanne, to see if there was something she could do for her. You heard Buck tell about the rest of it; the bed hadn't been slept in and nothing was out of order except that a pair of black satin slippers had been left on the floor near a chair. She didn't wear 'em yesterday."

"You examined the room yourself, didn't you, Doctor?" asked McCarty.

"Yes, but there wasn't a thing there to tell where she'd gone, nor how, nor why. She'd brought enough clothes for that fortnight's visit to last an ordinary woman for a year, but Mis' Hatherly and that Jeanne went through 'em and finally found out that a black lace dress she had worn once last week was missing and so was what they called a 'polo coat.' That kind of put the cap on Buck's identification. Mis' Hatherly didn't know what to think when she first saw that empty room but from the minute Buck told her about some strange woman being murdered down here to the Cove she was possessed that it must have been Mis' Wall; she threatened to come down herself and find out if Buck wouldn't."

"He didn't want to, then?" McCarty glanced up.

"I calc'late he thought it was just foolishness; not the murder, but the idea that it could be Mis' Wall. When she saw the room and the clothes and all, Mis' Hatherly got hysterics again and I had a worse time with her than when I first got there, but she calmed down enough

to tell me what she could about the other woman. It seems that when she and Mr. Hatherly were down in Florida last winter they met a Boston family they knew who introduced some other folks that had friends on a big, fancy yacht offshore. Mis' Hatherly liked 'em and one night at a dinner party on board she was made acquainted with this Mrs. Wall, who was stopping at another hotel right near theirs. The next day they met again at the Beach Club and then somewheres else and you know how it is with women; in a fortnight they were thicker'n molasses." The coroner shrugged. "Mis' Wall was pretty and knew all the best people and seemed to have scads of money but she was quiet and didn't talk much about herself. Mis' Hatherly kind of pieced together from what little she did say, though, that her husband had been rich and considerably older than she and that he died seven or eight years ago, soon after they were married. Mis' Wall had traveled quite some since, here and Europe and everywhere. She owned a home just outside of Philadelphia at a place called Maple Hill but she rented it because it was too big for her to bother with, all by herself. That's the nearest she ever come to mentioning her home town, as far as Mis' Hatherly can recollect."

"But after that time in Florida didn't they see anything of each other until now?" Dennis asked.

"They met again in the spring when they were both in New York on a shopping trip but that was all, although they kept writing to each other," replied the coroner. "Mis' Hatherly had taken a great fancy to her."

"Couldn't you find out something from going through her things, Doctor?" McCarty's gaze wandered to the bag.

"Not a whole lot. There's a big, square leather box full of hats and a trunk for her dresses and fol-de-rols but only a handful of letters and papers. I brought 'em back with me and maybe you'd like to look 'em over, Mr. Doe. The constable told me how you figured out those little p'ints in the cabin and your eyes do see more'n most, for certain!" Doctor Allen waddled over to the bag and, stooping with some difficulty on account of his girth, he picked up the bag and placed it on the table. "This was all stacked up inside with silver fixin's; brushes and combs and powder puffs and more truck than ever you see! Beats all what city women need to get themselves tidied up! There were a sight of fancy bottles and jars too, but I left 'em out thinking they'd spill."

After some manipulation he succeeded in opening the bag, and McCarty uttered a quick exclamation. The first thing that had met his gaze was a small check book.

The coroner chuckled dryly once more.

"I thought that would be a help too, especially when I saw that Mis' Wall had kept her stubs straight, which most women don't. It shows that she banks at the Palladium Trust Company in New York and keeps a pretty large checking account but aside from that it ain't a mite of use; she has drawn fairly regular amounts to 'cash' which I judge to be for living expenses, but all the other checks that don't tally with the receipts in the

bottom of the bag are made out just one way—'to bearer.'"

"What are the receipts for?" McCarty asked quickly.

"Oh, milliners and dressmakers, and hotels, and beauty parlors, and garages and florists." The coroner waved his hands in an expressive gesture. "'Bout everything a woman needs to live that fashionable, flyaway kind of a life."

"'About everything a woman needs,'" repeated McCarty. "And these checks 'to bearer'; do they average regular sums, too, and are they drawn on any set dates?"

"No. You won't find one for three weeks or a month, mebbe, and then there'll come a whole passel of 'em, for anywhere from four or five hundred dollars to a couple of thousand. That's why they won't help us any."

"If you're asking me, I'd say they would help you a lot if you could find out who this 'bearer' party is; not as to the murder itself but just to get a line on the lady if it should happen that none of her folks show up. Maybe you wouldn't mind if Denny here made a copy of the stubs? You've kind of let us in on this with you, you see, Doctor, and just for curiosity I'd like to trace some of them." McCarty's smile was blandly ingratiating. "It's not often two private citizens get a chance at the inside of an investigation like this and I might be able to give you a few pointers on this check business that you wouldn't have time to look up for yourself."

"I hope you can." Doctor Allen handed the check book to Dennis and gestured toward the bag. "Go

ahead. There's no way I know of to trace that 'bearer' and those letters in there are just from acquaintances, the kind I calc'late would run a mile from a scandal like a murder case. I swan I'm up a tree."

He seated himself on the haircloth sofa with his hands on his pudgy knees and his small, bright eyes blinked up in perplexity to McCarty.

"Well, you can be sure of one thing, of course; that headache yesterday was a blind. Mrs. Wall wanted to get out of the house for a couple of hours without anybody knowing it, nor where she was going, and she thought maybe she'd be back in time to join the others in order to keep up appearances. That's why she said she'd be down later if she felt better, and why she left out that pair of black satin slippers which matched the dress and the thin stockings, so they'd be handy to change from the clumping shoes of her. The young man said this morning that she knew no one in the neighborhood. Did Mrs. Hatherly tell you the same thing?"

"Yes. Mis' Wall had never been down on the Cape before and she was real interested in everything and kept asking all kinds of questions. She was afraid of the water and wouldn't go sailing but they took her automobiling along the shore nearly every day. She seemed to like best to just set around and not leave the grounds, though, being down here for a rest."

"Automobiling, eh? Did you find out where they drove to, or if she ever suggested any particular place? Did she go out alone for a walk before last night? Has she been down here in the village at any time during her

visit?" McCarty shot the questions at the other. "Did they have any other company?"

"I didn't think to ask," the coroner confessed. "I don't see what that's all got to do with it. The thing is, what happened to her last night?"

"We know what happened to her!" McCarty retorted grimly. "We want to find out who did it and why. My dear man, take thought for a minute! That woman didn't look as though she needed any rest; she liked a gay, fashionable whirl and she lived on the excitement of it. Why would she that hated the water be coming down here where there was nothing else except that and sand and cranberry bogs, right in the middle of the season, to visit people she hardly knew? 'Twas not for their society or amusement or the fine scenery, you can bank on that! What was she doing in Boston, so conveniently near when she wrote how tired out she was? I'd like to see that note; it sounds to me as though she fished for the invitation and Mrs. Hatherly bit! There'd be no excuse for thinking all this, of course, if she hadn't sneaked out as she did and come to her death; but if the Hatherlys are telling a straight story there can be just one of two reasons why she came here to visit at all, and to find out which one it was you'll have to know every move she made and every word and look of her since she came that they can call to mind."

Dennis was apparently deep in his impromptu secretarial labors, but he glanced up at the coroner's exclamation.

"Jumping Jupiter! I can't see one reason, let alone

two, why she should want to come here if it wasn't to make a nice, quiet visit with the Hatherlys but you can bet I'll learn everything she said and did if I have to drag it out of them at the inquest! They're only too glad to tell all they know, though. Young Buck said, if you recollect, that he couldn't think of any reason for her going out like that except for some fresh air, and that she must have lost her way in the storm and a maniac killed her, mebbe, but we ain't got any crazy folks around Spindrift Cove. Some of the old people at the Poor Farm a mile or so east up the highroad are getting childish and we've got a half-wit who lives up aways, but Sol Whitaker wouldn't harm a fly. She didn't go out expecting to be murdered, that's certain, and there's no reason why she couldn't have anybody come to see her at the house unless—unless there was something shady about it. That would mean she wasn't the sort of woman Mis' Hatherly had ought to be friends with."

He spoke hesitatingly and McCarty shook his head.

"Not necessarily it wouldn't. Her going out like that on the quiet don't look good, nor yet that she might have used the Hatherlys as a convenience in coming here, but she maybe had her own private business in seeing somebody last night that would excuse her. We're in the dark now, you see, Doctor, and we've got to consider everything. How far is the Hatherly place from here?"

"About two miles west on the highroad."

"I'd like to see for myself the lay of the land around

here and what roads or paths Mrs. Wall might have taken to bring her to that shack," McCarty remarked with a sidelong glance at Dennis, who was replacing in the bag the envelopes and papers he had been looking over. "I don't suppose there's a flivver that I could hire from anybody at the Cove? Denny can drive a car if he can't manage a dory and there would be time yet this afternoon for a bit of a run."

"You couldn't hire one, but I've got my own two-seater and I'll drive you myself." The coroner rose with sudden decision. "Your friend is thinner than either of us and he can hang to the little extry place I fix on the running-board, if his shoulder don't pain him too much. She's back in the shed and I'll go and get her right now! If you can give me any suggestions I want to be there on the spot."

"You'll let me have a peep at that bag, later?" McCarty asked as Dennis pushed it under the piano and turned expectantly. "Not that there could be anything in it that you've overlooked, but just for my own satisfaction."

"Any time before the inquest that you say. I'll have the car out front in a jiffy!"

When he had gone Dennis remarked:

"I listened with one ear while I was copying those stubs and comparing them with the receipts and I saw what you were getting at if the coroner didn't, but have you taken it into consideration that young Buck Hatherly might be guessing right, in a way? Not about a maniac,

I don't mean, but that no matter who she went out to meet and for whatever reason, she mightn't have got there?"

"What in the——!" McCarty stared.

"You needn't be goggling at me like that, Mac! Besides the fact that we've heard nothing about any jewelry, nor have you thought to ask; there was none found on the body and a woman with the money to throw around that's proved in that check book would have lots of it. If she left it home at the Hatherlys there's still the chance that she lost her way in the storm and butted in on a scene that wasn't intended for witnesses, the same as you yourself did later when you broke into the cabin," Dennis asserted doggedly. "This time yesterday I was thinking there was nothing here but simple-minded folk who slaved away for a bare living and hadn't a thought except for a catch of fish that would earn them an honest supper, but now I'd take my chances of dying a natural death in the city any day."

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" McCarty demanded.

"I have not," Dennis retorted with dignity. "Didn't you wonder yourself for what was the constable wandering around the beach after midnight? Answer me that!"

The rattle and clatter of a car beyond the windows saved McCarty from the necessity of a reply, and they hurried out to where the doctor awaited them in a rickety, dust-covered runabout. The narrow street was filled with people by now and they gaped and stared as

the trio scurried by, McCarty's none too slender figure wedged in beside the driver's superabundant bulk and Dennis folded up like a jack-knife on the seat on the running-board.

They made their way among the cars parked at the end of the street and had started across the rutted cart-tracks of the common when a man racing toward them in a huge, high-powered red car pulled out at the side and held up his hand.

" 'Afternoon, Mr. Norris." The coroner slowed down. "Did you want me?"

"Only to know if what I've heard is true!" The man's voice was hoarse and his broad, freshly shaven face twitched. "They say the woman found butchered in that cabin last night has been identified; that she was a visitor at a house back here on the highroad. Is that straight?"

The coroner nodded.

"She was a friend of the Hatherlys, a Mis' Wall."

"Great God!" The cry seemed wrung from the man. "It was true, then!—Great God!"

For an instant longer he stared and then suddenly, pulling himself together, he swung the wheel, turned, and rushed off at a mad pace in the direction from which he had come.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. HATHERLY SPEAKS

"ASIDE from it being a murder, the fact that it was Mrs. Wall who got killed seems to be affecting a lot of people here in a place where she didn't know anybody and wasn't heard of till ten days ago." McCarty's eyes were following the big red car as it slowed around the turn at the highroad and tore eastward, but he was thinking, too, of the slender, blue-eyed girl at Mrs. Griscom's.

"That was Mr. Gilbert Norris," the coroner explained. "He knows the Hatherlys and mebbe he met Mis' Wall at their house last week. He's kiting home fast, isn't he?"

"Has his family got a place around here for the summer time, too?"

"He hasn't got a family, that I ever heard tell of," replied the other with a sly wink. "Keeps bachelor hall in an old house he owns up by where the Barnstable road branches off and they do say there are high jinks when he brings a party of men out from town for the fishing. I calc'late they don't get many fish! Card playing till morning and rum, too, but the constable ain't ever been

able to catch him restocking his cellar though he's been laying for him all summer. That's just talk though; everybody likes him, they can't help it. He's that kind."

The little car was skittering in and out of the ruts, its mudguards bumping and every loose part a-rattle. Dennis hung on grimly with chattering teeth, his sprained shoulder throbbing with every jolt, and McCarty found it difficult to collect his thoughts. One fact, however, stood out incontrovertibly in his mind; sometime, somewhere, he had seen Gilbert Norris before.

All at once they lurched violently, almost dislodging Dennis from his precarious seat, and the coroner yelled:

"Hey, you, Sol! Want me to run you down?"

At the same moment McCarty caught a glimpse of a leering, yellow-toothed smile and round, vacant eyes rolling at them from beneath a thatch of tousled, tow-colored hair. Then it was gone and Dennis exclaimed:

"Wha-what was that!"

"Sol Whitaker. He's the half-wit I spoke of a while ago. Folks around here call him God's fool, but he's bright enough in a queer, cracked way when he wants to be," the coroner responded. "He lives in a little hut up the road and there was some talk of putting him in the Poor Farm but he earns enough to keep himself, helping with the nets and boats, and he's never harmed anybody.—Here's the highroad."

He turned to the left and the rattling jar decreased. Dennis relaxed his hold with a heartfelt sigh.

"Plimptonport is the other way, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes. We're headed west toward the canal, though

it's a good ways from here. I'm only going to run up here a couple of miles and show you the Hatherly place. It must have been either along this road or cutting across through that swamp-grass to the marshes and dunes that Mis' Wall must have come last night."

McCarty gazed about him at the desolate waste, barren and bleak to his inartistic eye even in the golden afternoon light. Little velvety pools lay here and there amid the tall, rippling, brown-green grasses, with clumps of stunted, wind-distorted trees on higher ground to their right where the earth fought with the ever-encroaching sand for supremacy. Then the road turned inland and barren farms appeared, interspersed with the modern cottages and well-kept grounds of summer residents.

Dennis, also, regarded their surroundings with a critical and disparaging gaze.

"For a lady that likes the gay life of such places as the one where she met Mrs. Wall, I shouldn't think that Mrs. Hatherly would have taken to it down here," he observed.

"I calc'late she gets plenty of excitement in the winter and that's one reason why they came here in the first place, so she'd have a chance to rest up; she's just a passel of nerves." The coroner pointed ahead over the mud-caked windshield. "That is Hatherly House we're coming to, now."

Scientific care and cultivation had forced the sandy soil to yield abundantly here, and trim, glossy hedges surrounded a stretch of smooth, vivid lawn, intersected by a winding driveway which led to the house.

"If Mrs. Hatherly is as high-strung as you say, Doctor, maybe she's downright sick now, what with the shock and all." McCarty's tone was gravely sympathetic but there was a twinkle in his eyes. "Hadn't you better go in and inquire?"

"That's what I brought you out here for!" The coroner chuckled. "When you began firing those questions at me that I couldn't make head nor tail of I see that you were thinking faster and further than I was, and though I'm older'n you and I've learned a whole lot about human nature right in Spindrift Cove, I shouldn't be surprised if you knew a sight more about the goings-on in the world. If you can make anything out of what you learn of Mis' Wall's actions since she's been here, I'm going to give you the chance."

The white house, long and low and rambling, and topped by a sloping, red roof, stretched spacious wings on either side of the veranda, gay with its striped awnings and splashes of scarlet from the flowering plants set about in tubs; but the shades were drawn and there was a general air of desolation and gloom despite the garish color note. Involuntarily, as they drew up, the coroner lowered his voice.

"You two get right out and wait on the porch till I go in and have a little talk with Mis' Hatherly. I've got one argument that'll bring her around and she knows her didoes don't fool me, not when she puts 'em on! I think mebbe she'll talk to you fast enough when I get through."

They obeyed in silence, but when a trim maid in black

had admitted him and they were left alone, Dennis remarked:

"I'm thinking maybe we'd have had better luck if we'd scouted around by ourselves and got in with the help. That's how we've managed to get a lot of dope before, if you'll remember, and now we're queered here."

"What I'm wanting, the servants couldn't give me in a million years, though I'm not saying they mightn't be useful, too," McCarty returned. "Let's see that dope-sheet for a minute, the list of the stubs in the check book. Did you think to put down the names that were signed to any of the letters?"

"Was it amusing myself by drawing pictures I was, or something, when I'd finished with the stubs?" retorted Dennis sarcastically. "I can call to mind the look of every one of them that it was worth while to remember. Them that I've checked off were just formal little notes of a few lines from acquaintances, maybe, that she'd picked up the way she got in with Mrs. Hatherly, and the most of them, women. The ones who wrote two or three times I've put a cross after for each letter. Here you are."

McCarty ran his gaze rapidly down the list.

"Who's 'Gertrude'?" he asked.

"Violet paper, purple ink and a big splashy signature," responded Dennis. "I put two and two together and from what she said I guess they'd been to several places at the same time, French Lick and Hot Springs and more that I don't recall. Her letters were the most sociable and informal-like but at that they weren't what

you would call intimate. None of them read as though they came from a close friend."

"How about 'Claude'? You've got him double-starred."

"Oh, him? Because he ended his notes in such a funny way. They were both polite enough invitations to the theater—although he called it just 'the play' without saying what they were to see—and before he signed his name in queer, fine, wriggly letters he wrote: 'I kiss your hands.' That didn't sound like a regular man to me! Why did he talk about it?"

McCarty was on the point of speaking again when the coroner's voice, deferential, but with that deeper note of authority in his tones which they remembered since the morning, sounded from somewhere just within.

"I am not here as the doctor now, ma'am, but as the coroner of the Cove. Of course, if you'd rather go over it all on Thursday before the neighbors and the folks from the village and as many strangers—reporters, mebbe—as can crowd in to the inquest——! . . . No, not long; just a few minutes . . . I knew you could brace up if you'd try . . . Yes, on the porch. Take my arm, ma'am, if you're shaky."

After a moment the door opened and the coroner reappeared, leading a tiny figure in trailing, black draperies with a drooping mass of golden curls about a face that was exquisite even in its pallor. If the small nose was a trifle sharp at the tip and the rosebud lips were a shade too thin, the impression was forgotten in the charm of her eyes and perfection of her whole dainty form.

"She'd be a raving beauty with a bit of color!" Dennis whispered as they rose. "Just now she *looks* like a doll that has been left out in the rain!"

There was something doll-like, too, yet infinitely graceful in the limp way she relaxed into her chair after they had been presented and motioned for them to be seated, and her eyes were wide and guileless as she turned them on McCarty.

"Doctor Allen tells me that you are assisting him with his investigation, Mr. Doe," she began. "It was you who found poor—poor Mrs. Wall, too, wasn't it? This is inexpressibly terrible to me. I feel faint whenever I think of it, and—and of course I can think of nothing else! I cannot bear to speak of it, but the doctor says I must!"

"Not about what happened after Mrs. Wall left the house, ma'am," McCarty replied. "We'll just try to put that out of our minds and I want you to think back hard over the past ten days. Mrs. Wall came a week ago last Saturday, didn't she? Did she look as good as when you saw her in the spring?"

"Oh, yes! She had such splendid, vivid coloring, you know. I thought she looked even better than when we met in town." Mrs. Hatherly's great, limpid eyes were fastened candidly on McCarty's face.

"And was her manner the same as ever? Did she seem nervous or excited about anything?"

"No, she was delighted to see my husband and me again and to meet my brother-in-law, and be with us all. I remember that she went into raptures about the

house and the scenery down here and glimpses she had caught of quaint little places from the train. That was unusual, too, for though Mrs. Wall was never bored nor languid she was seldom enthusiastic. I—I can't recall much about that first evening; we talked a great deal, of course, as friends do when they haven't seen each other in some time, but it wasn't of anything important, just about mutual acquaintances and where she had been since May."

"Where had she been?" asked McCarty, his mind going back to the list of stubs from the check book.

"To Philadelphia, to see about repairs for her property, and then a round of house parties until the season opened at the summer hotels. She has been in the Berkshires and Southampton and the White Mountains, and Bar Harbor was the last. Then she came to Boston and wrote to me." Mrs. Hatherly was twisting her wisp of a lace handkerchief between her fingers. "Oh, what does all this matter? When she came to us she said that the season had worn her out and I fancy she *was* tired even though she didn't look it, because she didn't seem inclined to go about at all. That is what makes it the more inexplicable that last night——!"

"We haven't got to last night, ma'am," McCarty reminded her. "Didn't you think it was sort of funny that though Mrs. Wall was so interested in everything down here she wasn't anxious to see it?"

"No." Her tone was hesitating, however. "We motored her about the Cape and she liked that but when my brother-in-law offered to take her for walks along

the shore and through the Cove, she said she preferred to do her exploring from a garden chair."

"I see." McCarty reflected for a moment. "Did Mrs. Wall ever go out alone for a bit of a walk?"

"Yes. One afternoon—it was Wednesday, I remember—when I thought she was resting in her room my husband met her a little way from here on the highroad. The car had gone to the station at Plimptonport to meet him and he brought her home." Mrs. Hatherly paused. "Then two nights later she disappeared right after dinner. We were waiting for her to play bridge and supposed her to be in the garden, but it wasn't until I had called and called and my brother-in-law had gone to look for her that she came in. She said the night had been so lovely that she had lingered longer than she realized, but then she stopped, for I think she saw that we were all looking at her gown and slippers. They were sodden and simply ruined from the marsh, but she only laughed. You don't suppose—you don't suppose that she had started for wherever it was she meant to go last night and got lost then too?"

"There's no telling, ma'am.—So you played bridge that night?"

"We did nearly every evening. There wasn't anything to do except that and motor in the daytime."

"Mrs. Wall wasn't a very good player, was she?" McCarty inquired unexpectedly. "I mean, not a very even one. She'd play a brilliant hand or two and then make some bull that would gum up the game, wouldn't she?"

"How could you know?" The rosebud lips parted in astonishment. "It used to provoke Mr. Hatherly, but Mr. Norris was just amused. My brother-in-law wasn't much interested in cards, and of course we only played a very small game."

"Do you mean Mr. Gilbert Norris?" McCarty watched her narrowly and the lady's pretty eyelids fluttered slightly beneath his scrutiny.

"Yes. He is a neighbor of ours. He has a cottage nearby and runs down occasionally from town for the fishing. Usually he brings a party of men out with him but last week he came alone and we saw quite a little of him." She spoke more quickly. "I think he was rather attracted to—to Mrs. Wall."

"Did you have any other company while she was here?"

"Only one or two ladies from our scattered summer colony who ran in for tea. We really have no social life down here, you know. I asked the Lowdens and Mr. Thompson for dinner one evening but they couldn't come; Mrs. Lowden was suffering from ivy poisoning and I scarcely expected Mr. Thompson to accept, he seldom goes anywhere." She paused and then added in explanation: "The Lowdens have a bungalow further up the shore and Mr. Thompson is an artist——"

"You met him this morning," the coroner interrupted.

McCarty nodded, recalling the pleasant but eccentric-looking man with the dog whom they encountered when they left the jail, and on whose property the cabin stood in which the tragedy had occurred.

"You said, ma'am, that Mrs. Wall liked motoring. Did she ever suggest any particular place to go that you can remember?" he asked.

"How could she, when she didn't know anything about the Cape?" Mrs. Hatherly replied plaintively. "I don't think she really enjoyed it so very much, for she didn't like our strong east winds and bundled herself up so in veils and things that she could scarcely see. Mrs. Wall wasn't very keen about outdoor sports, anyway. She played a little golf and tennis, and rode, of course, but that was just because everyone else did."

"What *did* she like?" McCarty felt his way. "Was it reading, or music, or pictures or just chasing around from place to place to have a good time?"

"Why—I don't know." Mrs. Hatherly spoke slowly. "I don't think that she had any especial hobby, if that is what you mean. Mrs. Wall was wonderfully clever and a brilliant conversationalist, well-posted on finance and world affairs and things that men talk about, but she didn't interest herself actively in politics or anything of that sort. She seemed to enjoy everything, but impersonally, like a bystander, and yet she was so magnetic, so thoroughly alive——!"

Her voice faltered and Mrs. Hatherly put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Just a few more questions, ma'am, and then I won't trouble you any longer." McCarty's tone was respectfully sympathetic. "You say that she was up on financial matters. Do you know if she ever speculated in stocks?"

"I—I couldn't say. She knew the market reports

and used to talk them over with my husband, but I never heard her mention trading on her own account." Mrs. Hatherly drew a little, quivering sigh. "I told Doctor Allen that I didn't know anything about her personal affairs. We were great friends but we never discussed business matters."

"You judged her to be wealthy, didn't you?"

"Mrs. Wall must have had a large income to spend money as lavishly as she did and I understood that it came from her late husband's estate. I don't recall that she ever told me so definitely."

"And you don't know where she came from in the beginning? Didn't it seem a bit queer to you, ma'am, that she never spoke of her girlhood?"

Mrs. Hatherly stirred impatiently.

"No. Why should it? We were always trotting about somewhere when we were together before and had no time for intimate talks if either of us had cared for them. I—I didn't realize how very little we had in common until now. In fact, my invitation to her to visit us was just a whim. Oh, if only I hadn't asked her! If only she hadn't come!"

"Never mind, ma'am, it was to be, I'm thinking," McCarty observed, and then added as though a sudden thought had struck him; "Mrs. Wall wasn't superstitious, at all, I suppose?"

Mrs. Hatherly's sobs ceased and once more she stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, she was, but it is odd that you should have guessed! I never could understand it somehow in a

woman of her poise and intelligence, but she really believed in all sorts of silly old signs and omens. They—they didn't warn her last night, poor girl!—Oh, Mr. Doe, it's all so mysterious and awful! I don't know what to think about her going out secretly like that or what may be disclosed about her now but I can't think there was anything really scandalous or wrong! She held herself irreproachable and only went with the best people!"

"You spoke of her having been in the White Mountains since spring and we know she stopped at a hotel in Bretton Woods, but did she ever mention any other place in New Hampshire to you? Just a bit of a place, it would be; a village, like."

The coroner was eyeing him open-mouthed and Dennis seemed to be lost in a brown-study, but Mrs. Hatherly shook her golden head decidedly.

"No. I am quite sure that she didn't. As a matter of fact, I remember that when she spoke of the White Mountains she said that she had never been in New Hampshire before."

"Well, that's that. Nothing else happened out of the ordinary during her visit that you can remember except her two little strolls by herself?"

"Nothing."

"You have a telephone, I know. Did she ever use it? Did anybody call her up?"

"I couldn't say. She did not telephone to anyone that I know of, and if anybody called her up Lizzie would

know; she or her sister, the housemaid, usually answer. Shall I ring for them?"

"No, don't trouble." The coroner rose. "With your permission I'll go and ask them about it."

Mrs. Hatherly nodded and he disappeared within the house, but before McCarty could speak she leaned toward him.

"Tell me, have they found out anything? Is there any clew to—to the murderer?" Her voice was low and tense.

"There's no crime without a clew, ma'am." McCarty's eyes had narrowed. "Whatever's found has to be traced up, of course."

"I know that!" She made a gesture of impatience. "But what have they found? What do they know?"

McCarty shook his head.

"I couldn't tell you, Mrs. Hatherly. Likely you'll learn all about it at the inquest."

For a moment longer she gazed at him. Then with a little shrug she closed her eyes and sank back in her chair.

"When do you get mail here?" he asked after a pause, as though her questions had never been uttered. "Does one of the help go to the post-office for it?"

"Yes, morning and evening. Most of it comes in the morning, however, and it is put beside our plates at the breakfast table," she replied tonelessly.

"Did Mrs. Wall receive very much here? Did any of it seem to disturb her?" McCarty continued.

"No. I don't believe more than a dozen letters came for her since her arrival. Very few of her friends knew she was here and none of the letters which she opened in my presence seemed to disturb her; she merely glanced at them and laid them aside."

"Did any come for her yesterday morning?" McCarty in his turn bent forward.

"None, Mr. Doe."

"Nor any message by hand during the day?"

"Not any that I know of, but the servants——?"

"We won't bother about them now. I want to know first what jewelry Mrs. Wall had with her down here and if she wore any of it last night."

"No, she didn't.—Oh, I meant to tell Doctor Allen, for he asked about that this morning." She turned in her chair as the coroner reopened the door and came out upon the veranda. "Doctor, I found Mrs. Wall's jewels, the two rings and small string of pearls which I told you she was wearing yesterday. They were rolled in a handkerchief and tucked behind a bottle of toilet water on a shelf in her bathroom. I'll get them for you later.—She brought only a small quantity with her and gave all but those three pieces to Bill—my husband—to lock in his safe for her, together with all her money except a few small bills. We'll have to wait until he returns from Boston for these; he is the only one who knows the combination."

Mrs. Hatherly added the last in explanation to McCarty, and he nodded.

"Now, then, ma'am, will you please tell me everything you can recall that Mrs. Wall said or did yesterday?"

"There really isn't anything to tell, except that she did seem to be a trifle restless and distrait all day. We arose late and sat about and chatted until lunch intending to motor to some friends of ours near Long Pond in the afternoon, but we gave it up because Mrs. Wall had a headache. Perhaps I just imagine it because of—of the terrible thing that followed, but I think her nervousness increased as time passed. Just before tea she said she would go to her room and lie down for awhile and that was the last I knew until the maid knocked at my door with the message that she would not be down for dinner. I—I never saw her again!"

"You had no company for dinner?" McCarty seemed to be choosing his words with care.

"No. Mr. Norris dropped in at tea just after Mrs. Wall had gone upstairs but he left shortly and my husband and I dined alone. Then the squall came up and after that the thunder-storm."

"Your brother-in-law was not at home, then?"

"No. He went out in his car somewhere before dinner and I didn't see him again till this morning." Mrs. Hatherly paused and added hesitatingly: "I don't know when—when he returned."

CHAPTER X

MC CARTY EXPLORES

"THE coroner thinks you're holding out on him, Mac," Dennis remarked an hour later as the two were washing up for supper in their room at the Griscoms'. "For the matter of that you're holding out on me too. What about Mrs. Wall being a bum bridge player and superstitious besides, and where did you get the notion she'd been to some little village in New Hampshire?"

McCarty paused in his manipulation of the saw-toothed razor borrowed from Captain Griscom and grinned through the lather which streaked his countenance.

"The first two were just shots in the dark that hit the bull's-eye and the other was a bloomer so far, but Mrs. Hatherly may not know everything or be telling all she knows at that. You'd as much reason as me to guess what I did."

"All right!" Dennis retorted with unusual bitterness. "Have it as you like! I've a guess or two of my own that I'll be after answering with thanks to nobody."

He was as good as his word, for when McCarty awakened on the following morning his erstwhile partner had vanished, and Millie informed him that she had given

Dennis his breakfast in a hurry when she first came downstairs. The girl looked pale and wan, and the shadowed circles beneath her blue eyes told of a sleepless night. McCarty recalled the constable's gossip once more and wondered if the little school-teacher had really taken Buck Hatherly's attentions seriously and been jealous of the murdered woman, his sister's guest.

Crossing the street, he sounded the knocker on the door of the little white cottage, and the coroner himself responded to the summons.

"Good morning, Doctor. I came to learn if maybe this bandage on my head couldn't be exchanged for a bit of plaster?" he asked. "I'm a marked man enough in the village without this decoration to point me out!"

"Come into the office and I'll see." The doctor waddled ahead of him down the hall. "I'm going over to Plimptonport in the car to send some telegrams I don't want to 'phone from here; care to come along?"

There was a reserve that was not without a hint of reproach in his tones, but his manner was as kindly as ever as he attended to his patient and McCarty felt a twinge of compunction. This wasn't his game after all, and that he was permitted to take a hand was due solely to the coroner's good will. Here was a debt to pay, and at the risk of losing the incognito he had so carefully preserved he must square it.

"Look here, Doctor," he began, when the strip of plaster was adjusted, "I won't be going to Plimptonport with you, thanking you all the same, but there's a bit of a tip I could give you, a telegram to send to a certain

party I've heard of, that might bring results. It'd have to be worded just as I tell you though, even if you don't understand it and I'll ask for your promise never to let on to a soul where you got the dope on it. It may have nothing to do with Mrs. Wall herself, to say nothing of the murder but then again it may."

The coroner's broad face lightened.

"I'll be mighty glad to send it!" he responded heartily. "I know you ain't hankering to get mixed up in this thing and I don't blame you; you can count on it nobody'll find out from me that you were back of it. Who is it going to?"

"To Inspector Druet, Police Headquarters, New York." The name of his old superior came affectionately from McCarty's lips. "Just say this, Doctor: 'Confidential information wanted Randolph's old shops New York, Great Barrington, Bretton Woods, Bar Harbor, Boston. Rush.' Sign it with your own name as coroner here and fix it with the operator in Plimptonport to send the answer to you in some way by messenger instead of 'phoning it. Tell him to get it here as quick as ever it comes over the wires."

"His boy Jim can bring it on his motorcycle." The coroner read again to himself the message which he had written as the other dictated, and shook his head. "If you ain't around, Mr. Doe, when the answer comes, the probabilities are that I won't be able to make head nor tail of it. I never heard tell of a chain of stores up through those summer places and I can't figger how you came to connect Mrs. Wall with 'em nor why the

New York police should know about it, but it goes as soon as I can get to Plimptonport. Inspector Druet, hey? Seems to me I've read his name in a city paper, about some murder case it was, too.—Well, I hope there's something in your idea, whatever it is. 'Sfar as I can see the inquest is going to be a fizzle to-morrow."

"What've the sheriff and the constable been doing?" McCarty inquired as he rose.

"Squabbling with each other, mostly." Doctor Allen's bright, beady eyes twinkled. "Eb Bartlett is about tearing his whiskers out by the roots and rampaging around that shack trying to find clews and the sheriff's been out to the Hatherlys' twice but I calc'late all he did was to work up trade for me by getting Mis' Hatherly down sick; they sent for me already this morning and I never saw her in such a state!"

"Did Mr. Hatherly turn over to you Mrs. Wall's jewels, that he had in his safe?"

"Yes." The coroner lowered his voice as they went toward the porch together. "I'll be glad to pass 'em on to whoever gets 'em rightfully, I can tell you! Brooches and bracelets and I don't know what all! We ain't had a robbery in the Cove as long as I can remember to amount to anything but with so many strangers about I don't feel easy in my mind. When do you expect the answer ought to come to this telegram?"

"Some time this afternoon. I'll be around when you want me," McCarty promised. "You haven't seen anything of my friend Denny? He stole a march on me before I was up, having some idea of his own about the

murder and I want to find him or else he'll get the wrong mule by the tail."

The coroner had not encountered Dennis, however, and after he rattled off in his dilapidated car McCarty crossed to a small shop, the fly-specked window of which bore a tobacco sign. A scrawny little woman with thin hair drawn back in a tight knot and a timorous, apprehensive expression, which appeared to be habitual with her, came slowly forward as he entered.

"Good morning, ma'am." McCarty bowed. "It's cigars I'm looking for, if you've any in stock."

"These is all I got." She placed a dusty box listlessly on the counter. "Hain't much call for 'em, most o' the menfolks chews."

McCarty opened the box and groaned in spirit as its contents met his gaze, but he made his selection, conscious that her eyes were fixed upon him with a new expression and that she had backed away a step or two. He had evidently been recognized, and he resolved to take the initiative.

"It's a fine day, ma'am, isn't it?" He laid a dollar bill on the counter. "You'd never think such a storm would come up as the one night before last when that poor woman was done to death. 'Twas me blundered into that cabin and found her, as likely you've heard?"

The woman nodded and swallowed hard.

"Constable come afterwards, didn't he? I heard the commotion but I didn't know what it was all about. What—what was Eb Bartlett doin' himself down on the shore so late; did he say?"

"No, ma'am. Guess nobody thought to ask in the excitement. Hope they find out who killed her——"

He was about to add more when a door at the back of the shop opened and a fisherman slouched in. There was an unmistakable resemblance between him and the gaunt woman, and he scowled sullenly at the visitor.

"Susie, somethin's b'iled over!" he announced. "Hain't ye got nothin' better to do an' no better sense'n to tittle-tattle all day with folks that hain't got no business o' their own to mind?"

"I—I was only makin' change, Eph!" she protested meekly. "Here 'tis, mister."

"Thank you, ma'am." McCarty pocketed his loose silver, bowed once more and left the shop without a second glance at the lowering fisherman. But as he made his way up the street he wondered if the latter suspected him because of his arrest, and whether the opinion were commonly shared among the rest of the sea-going fraternity. The woman had been plainly afraid of him but she seemed more afraid of the man who had entered, and his curiosity was aroused.

He had not long to dwell upon it uninterruptedly, however, for as he crossed the common toward the highroad he heard an odd, throaty chuckle and looking about beheld a strange figure squatting in the shade of a dejected clump of shrubbery. It was a man in tattered garments with an enormous head set upon a grotesquely small body, and he was holding something between his hands which glinted when the sunlight touched it. Mc-

Carty recognized Sol Whitaker, the village idiot, and strolled toward him.

"Hello, Sol," he said genially. "What have you got there?"

The creature promptly put his hands behind him and squatted yet lower while the gloating expression on his face gave place to one of sly cunning.

"Findin's keepin's," he cackled. "Woman dropped it when she run.—Why don't ye run? Ev'rybuddy's scairt o' old Sol!"

"I'm not!" McCarty laughed. "Come on, let's see what you found and I'll give you a quarter."

The idiot shook his grotesque head.

"It shines pretty," he remarked. "Calc'late it's wuth a heap, too, most a dollar."

"Maybe I'd give you a dollar for it." McCarty jingled the change in his pocket suggestively. "A dollar will buy a lot of tobacco or—or candy."

"Candy!" Sol's loose lips slavered.

"Lots of it!" McCarty repeated persuasively. "Peppermint and chocolate and taffy! Show it to me anyway, Sol, and tell me when the lady dropped it and where she was running to."

He drew out a quarter and held it before the vacuous eyes which had taken on an avid gleam.

"Gal run 'long there." He gestured with a hairy hand toward the cart track which led to the village. "It was jus' afore the squall broke, t'other night. I see it shine when she dropped it. It shines real pretty. Mebbe it's wuth more'n a dollar."

A woman alone going towards the shore in the early evening of that storm!

"All right. Look at it all by yourself, Sol, and I'll keep my quarter." McCarty moved as though to return the money to his pocket. "Then you won't get a bit of candy."

Sol stretched out one hand with a cry.

"Give it here!" he whimpered. "Candy!—Look, mister! Don't it shine?"

His fingers closed over the coin and with the other hand he dangled before McCarty's eyes an object which caused the latter to grunt in disgust. It was a cheap rhinestone slipper buckle and although it glistened bravely in the sunshine its tawdriness was manifest. He knew that Mrs. Wall had left her jewels behind in her surreptitious departure from Hatherly House on Monday evening, but the vague idea had come to him that if she had encountered the idiot on the common and fled from him the shining thing might prove to be an ornament from her gown. Even to his inexperienced eyes it was manifest, however, that she would have worn nothing like that.

"It's pretty, all right," he said absently. "Take a dollar for it?"

But the glitter of his treasure trove had fascinated Sol anew and the quarter was sufficient for his immediate desires. Shaking his head, he leered impishly and thrust the buckle deep into a ragged pocket; then with a derisive wave he turned and ran off across the common.

McCarty continued on his way. He intended to follow

the highroad to a point beyond the little settlement and then skirt around the salt marshes in the direction of the shack on the Point. He had gone scarcely a dozen yards along the highway when a powerful motor roared along behind him from the west, and he stepped aside just as a big red car flashed past with Gilbert Norris at the wheel. His clean-shaven, good-looking face was convulsed by some violent emotion and he drove with a recklessness which betokened a turbulent mood; yet the brief glimpse of the man brought with it again that vague sense of familiarity.

The car disappeared ahead of him in a cloud of dust, and McCarty proceeded parallel with the shore until the cluster of cottages and cabins had disappeared, and only rolling sand dunes stretched, south, to the Sound. Leaving the highway, he struck out across them, fixing his course slightly westward again so as to come out approximately in the rear of the shack in which the murder had taken place. He had miscalculated the distance, however, and soon found himself floundering on the edge of the salt marsh, sinking deeper with every step into the ooze of sandy mold.

Disgusted, he was seeking a way out of the morass when all at once he discerned a double track, faint but unmistakable, which wound its path along a circuitous route towards the shore on what was apparently a ridge of firmer ground. The tracks were not wide enough for those of automobile tires nor could any car have plowed through the marsh, but the deep impress of horses' hoofs were visible here and there between them, and in spots

where the soil gave place to a stretch of oozing bog it was evident that planks had been laid down.

Why had a cart been driven from highroad to shore through the marsh, when parallel with it and only a short distance away it could have crossed the common and gone down the village street? McCarty supposed that driftwood and seaweed were collected from the beach and taken away for some purpose and it was probable that building sand was obtainable from the dunes, but no horses could have drawn a heavy load over that quaking bog, and the route taken suggested secrecy. Whatever had been conveyed to the beach or removed from it had been carried by stealth, and that recently, for the traces were comparatively fresh.

McCarty was skeptical of their possible connection with the mystery but at least they would lead him to the shore; and as he followed them he realized that whoever had driven the cart must have been thoroughly familiar with the marsh. Winding as the path was, it appeared to be the only way out of the morass.

He was so deep in his cogitations that he did not realize how far he had come when, abruptly, the marsh gave way to rolling sand and the tracks were lost, but they had led far enough; just ahead and a little to the right stood the cabin with the broken window.

McCarty was on the point of approaching it from the rear when the sound of voices made him pause and then hastily draw back over the ridge of the dune. The loud, bullying tones of the sheriff mingled with the higher, nasal ones of Constable Bartlett in wordy strife, and the

interloper decided to take his departure from the vicinity. He had no desire to encounter the sheriff until after the inquest, if it could be avoided.

The way back to the highroad was long and nothing could be gained by traversing it, while just on the other side of that strip of marshland to the right the brick chimneys of Thompson's house reared themselves among the scraggy trees of the garden and the fishermen's shacks that edged the village stood just beyond. Rough and worn as was the attire which he had donned for the fishing trip, that had come to so unexpected an end, McCarty would have no others until the bags were obtained from Plimptonport. For an instant he hesitated, then plunged into the marsh, splashing through the pools and jumping from hillock to hillock, until he finally emerged breathless and bespattered to the thighs and found himself facing a sere and meager but well-clipped hedge, with the artist himself regarding him in amazement from the other side.

"Good morning, sir." McCarty glanced down ruefully at his sodden legs and then laughed. "'Tis a mess I've made myself entirely, coming through that bog! Could I get around in front of your garden to the beach?"

"Certainly. Just follow the hedge——" He paused suddenly. "Why, you're one of the two men I met with Doctor Allen and the constable yesterday! Was it you or your friend who discovered the tragedy which took place down there?— Ah, I remember, it was you! Won't you come in? I've been anxious to have a talk with you."

He opened a little wicket gate in the hedge and Mc-

Carty passed through to a narrow brick side-path, which crossed the tiny patch of lawn to the wider walk leading down to the shore.

"Thanks, sir. I'll not stay longer than a minute, though, dirtying up your tidy yard with this muck. It seems I must be always trespassing on your property!"

"Not at all." Thompson waved a delicate blue-veined hand toward a garden seat beneath a tree. "Shall we sit here? I've been anxious to hear your own story of how you happened to find the cabin the other night and just what you think of the frightful affair. I have had one or two talks with the sheriff but he and the constable appear to be equally at sea. I am doubly interested in its solution since the body has been identified as that of a lady who was a house guest of some friends of mine on the highroad, and had I accepted an invitation to dine with them last week I should have been presented to her. Rather weird thought, that!—I am still unable to understand why I should not have heard some sound while the crime was being committed."

He talked in an odd, stilted fashion, as if speech did not come easily to his lips, and toyed nervously with his inevitable pipe.

"The wind was howling a gale, remember, sir, and the cabin is away off there. What was the first you knew of it?" McCarty turned until he sat half facing his host. "Was it the constable raising the neighborhood after he found me?"

"No. I did not hear even that, and I am usually a light sleeper." Thompson shook his head perplexedly.

"It was the shouts and general hubbub when the men began to rush along the shore past my place, here, that aroused me. I looked out of my window and saw the lanterns bobbing along the sand and converging at the Point. I fancied at first that someone might have been dashed ashore there, just as you had been further along, and I threw on some clothes and went out to see if any help were needed, mine being the nearest house. The men told me what had occurred and I glanced into the cabin but one look was enough!"

He shuddered as he had on the previous day when mentioning the murder, and McCarty gazed at him curiously. The man looked healthy enough with his clear eyes, tanned skin and lean but well-knit frame and yet he was a bundle of nerves.

" 'Twas an awful sight, and no mistake, Mr. Thompson. You'd slept straight through the thunder-storm?"

"No, that awakened me, of course, but when it passed over I dropped off to sleep again."

"Didn't your servants hear anything either?"

"I keep only one, an old woman named Peters, whose people live inland, and one of her relatives was ill. She received word Monday afternoon and went away immediately in the wagon with the man who brought the news, after leaving a cold meal spread for me. I made my own coffee, fed the setter and sat down to read, but the squall came up and I could not concentrate my thoughts, fearing that some accident might happen to Mrs. Peters on the way back, for the man's horse had seemed young and badly broken. The squall passed out

to sea, however, and a little after nine Mrs. Peters returned safely, so I went to bed." He paused and added: "She told me she had heard nothing when I questioned her the next morning but that is scarcely to be wondered at, for she is very deaf. To think that I passed such a tranquil, uneventful evening while a woman was being murdered almost at my door!"

"Things happen like that, sir," McCarty returned philosophically. "You'll be at the inquest to-morrow?"

"If it is necessary for jury duty, but I sincerely hope not!" Thompson knocked the ashes from his pipe. "That sort of thing is eminently distasteful to me. The coroner will not call me as a witness, of course, as I can tell him nothing.—But I should like to hear of your own experience."

McCarty narrated it briefly and then rose.

"I must be getting on back to the Griscoms', sir. 'Tis a pretty place you have here, with all the green things growing so close to the sand."

"Yes. I am rather proud of it, for I have won every foot of it back from the beach with my own hands," Thompson replied as he walked beside him down the wider path bordered by a glossy, luxuriant, low-growing plant. "It was a mere wilderness when I came two years ago, and gardening is more than a hobby with me; next to my painting and books it is almost a passion. I shall be sorry, when I go, to think of it falling again into a neglected state."

The setter had descended from the porch of the house and padded after them down the walk. As they halted

at the terrace steps leading to the strip of beach she came up and slipped a cold nose in her master's hand.

"You're thinking of going away?" McCarty asked.

"Yes. I want to go abroad for further study and I've been trying to make up my mind to it for some time." He paused once more, adding: "Do you and your friend plan to remain on here in Spindrift Cove for a little fishing when that sad business is concluded to-morrow?"

"We thought of it, sir," McCarty responded noncommittally.

"Then I shall hope to see you again." The other held out his hand. "Good-day."

As he plowed through the sand to the cluster of shacks which marked the end of the street, McCarty wondered why this man, who bore the reputation of being aloof and 'a mite soft,' should have taken him so gratuitously into his confidence. Was it because he was lonesome and didn't know it, or for some deeper reason?

CHAPTER XI

AN UNEXPECTED ANGLE

DENNIS did not put in an appearance at dinner time, and McCarty began to be seriously concerned over his friend's defection. What wild-goose chase could he have gone upon? He had not been in the immediate vicinity all the morning and unless he had taken a train from Plimptonport for some distant place on a supposed clew, gleaned from those letters to Mrs. Wall, McCarty could not conjecture what had become of him.

After dinner he called on the coroner with a view to studying the letters for himself, but Doctor Allen had not come home and he strolled down to the beach front once more, turning in the opposite direction from the shack towards where the western projection of land reached out in a wide curve to form the cove. The rolling, windswept dunes appeared deserted as far as the eye could see, but McCarty was not displeased; he wanted to be alone and think.

No matter who or what Mrs. Wall might prove to have been, the investigation into the actual events of Monday night appeared to be at a standstill. Mrs. Hatherly was concealing something; she was not telling all

that she knew about her guest, and her anxious queries during the coroner's brief absence from their interview on the previous day as to what had been found out betrayed a furtive interest in the crime, which even her immediate connection with it as the victim's hostess did not warrant. Young Buck Hatherly had left home before the dinner hour on the evening of the murder, and his sister-in-law did not know when he returned. He had not obviously attempted to conceal this fact in his recital of the affair, but he had ignored it.

Gilbert Norris, a casual acquaintance of Mrs. Wall for scarcely a week, exhibited signs of extraordinary emotion on learning it was she who had been murdered, and that morning when he passed in his car he appeared to be in a violent rage about something or other—and he had come from the direction of the Hatherlys. Moreover, McCarty was morally certain he had seen the good-looking Norris before, but not in the environment of a Cape Cod fishing village; nor was the name one that he could recall.

Why had Millie Baxter, Mrs. Griscom's niece, been so anxious to know if the slain woman was Mrs. Wall? Why was the artist, Thompson, as garrulous as an old maid about what he'd done on Monday evening, when he had done nothing at all, and who was the woman who ran across the common and dropped a rhinestone buckle at the half-wit Sol's feet?

Why in the name of common sense was everybody acting so strangely? Had ever there been a case before with not a conceivable clew and so many loose ends? In

his heart he had derided the ability of the local authorities to handle it, but with all his long years of metropolitan experience he, himself, had got no further than they! And now Denny had taken the air!

McCarty groaned in spirit, but as he toiled on over the sands his reverie was interrupted by the sound of a feminine voice humming one of the latest agonizing sentimental ballads. Ascending the rise of a dune, he saw in the depression below a young woman in a starched white dress seated beneath a beach umbrella with some flimsy knitting work in her hands.

As if aware of his gaze she glanced up, and he recognized the maid at the Hatherlys' who had admitted the doctor on their call of the previous afternoon. She had bright, snapping, rather bold black eyes and a sharply pointed chin, but there were dimples in her cheeks and McCarty became conscious that there was something not unprovocative in the stare with which she returned his own.

"Excuse me, miss." He took off his hat impressively. "I'm just passing along. I didn't mean to disturb you——"

"You ain't," she interrupted, with a smile. "This beach don't belong to me, thank heavings, so go as far as you like."

"It's a pretty beach, but not what you might call lively," McCarty reflected aloud.

"It was lively enough the other night, I guess, when you got washed ashore!" she retorted. "I saw you yesterday but I guess you didn't see me."

"Sure I did," he affirmed, and advanced towards her. "You're working at the Hatherlys' and 'twas you let Doctor Allen in when we went there yesterday. How in the world did you know who I was, miss?"

"Didn't I peek out and see you talking to Mrs. Hatherly on the porch for the longest while and wasn't I there to hear what she said afterwards? I wait on the the table and my sister Katie is the housemaid and between us we don't miss much in that house, but we're going next week. We was anyway, on account of it being so lonesome and Mrs. Hatherly all the time in tempers that no girl would stand, but after this murder you couldn't tie us here! Wasn't it something terrible? Poor Mrs. Wall! Katie and me can't hardly believe it even yet and it gives me the shivers whenever I think of it! Don't tell me anything about it; I don't want to hear! It'll be bad enough to-morrow!"

"Thank goodness, you don't!" McCarty ejaculated devoutly. "You're the first sensible young person I've met. Either they look at me as though I'd killed the poor lady myself or they ask questions about it till I'm near mad!"

"You're pretty good at questions yourself, ain't you?" She moved slightly and made room for him beneath the shade of the umbrella. "Wouldn't you like to rest yourself for a while?"

"Thank you, Miss Lizzie." He promptly accepted the invitation and laughed at her look of amazement. "At least, I take it that your name's Lizzie, if it's you that

answers the telephone, as Mrs. Hatherly said. My own is Mac Doe."

She acknowledged his self-introduction with a little nod.

"You had her in a fit yesterday—Mrs. Hatherly, I mean—with all the things you asked her! At that, though, I'll bet there's a lot you missed; not that it would be useful to you if you're helping Doctor Allen to find out who did the murder as Mrs. Hatherly said you were, but it's funny, that's all."

"I don't pretend to be a detective," McCarty declared with smug modesty. "Of course, there's a lot I missed and why wouldn't I, being a stranger to all of them and not knowing what's what. The only funny thing to me is why Mrs. Hatherly would stick in a hole like this at all. With her husband going to Boston on business so much I should think she'd be lonely and she looks like the kind that would want something gay doing all the time."

"Oh, I guess she ain't been lonely this summer, not so very." Lizzie compressed her lips. "There's somebody that's just crazy about her and she's been kidding him along something scandalous but she doesn't care anything for him; it's only to make her husband jealous. He's the big, good-natured kind that never sees anything, Mr. Hatherly is.—Have you heard of a gentleman named Gilbert Norris? He has a place down here."

She broke off to ask the question, and McCarty nodded.

"He was pointed out to me. He drives a big red

car, doesn't he? Is he the fellow that's crazy about Mrs. Hatherly?"

"Who else? He didn't meet her until this summer although I could tell from their talk that the men of the family had known him for some time. He usually has a crowd of men down with him and they didn't bother with society but lately he's been coming alone and running over to the house nearly every day and anybody with eyes in their head could see why! Then Mrs. Wall came and something funny happened."

"What?" McCarty's tone was invitingly confidential.

"The first time he called after she came was in the evening and they were all in the drawing-room. I announced him myself and heard Mrs. Hatherly introduce him to Mrs. Wall and they met as strangers, but they wasn't! What do you think of that?"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive! Later on that evening—it was the night after she came—I was serving iced drinks to them all on the veranda and her and him was by the railing a little apart from the rest. I saw a look pass between them and he said something in a low voice like you don't use to people when you first meet them and then they both laughed softly as though something struck them as being so funny they couldn't help it. I didn't think much about it then but in a few minutes Mrs. Wall said goodnight and went upstairs and as she passed me in the doorway her face was as black as a thunder-cloud." The girl paused and laughed. "You'll think I'm a terrible gossip going on like this, but I wasn't the only one that

noticed it in the next few days. Mrs. Hatherly herself got on!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed McCarty. He was thinking rapidly and a light was beginning to break over him. "Of course I don't think you're a gossip, my dear. Anything about the poor lady is interesting, seeing what happened to her after. I—I suppose she *was* what you might call a lady, wasn't she?"

"Oh, quite! Katie and me have worked in the best families and we can always tell if it's real or put on. Of course, Mrs. Hatherly wasn't jealous of her, not caring a thing for Mr. Norris, but no woman likes to have somebody who admires her took away right under her nose and she must have thought their friendship was awful sudden though I could see that Mrs. Wall avoided him all she could in a pleasant way. He was just as crazy about Mrs. Hatherly as ever but something seemed to kind of puzzle him about Mrs. Wall and I guess that's why he talked to her every chance he got. Anyway, one day at tea last week when they were alone Mrs. Hatherly up and asked Mrs. Wall right out if she'd ever met Mr. Norris before, but she just laughed it off and said: 'Of course not!' I don't know whether Mrs. Hatherly believed her or not but they acted a little cool though perfectly polite—you know, nasty-nice!—for a couple of days after that."

"Then they got friendly again?"

"Yes, after Mr. Norris called one afternoon and him and Mrs. Hatherly had a talk in the garden. Then they flirted worse than ever and who should get wise to it but

Mr. Clarence—'Buck' Hatherly, they call him—Mr. Hatherly's brother. I—I guess I'm talking more than I ought to!"

Lizzie took up a handful of sand and watched it sift between her fingers, and McCarty hastened to reassure her.

"'Twill go no further, my dear! You couldn't help seeing things that were right under your nose and the only wonder is himself not getting wise to what was going on. But how did you know young 'Buck' did?"

"Because him and Mrs. Hatherly had an awful fight about it. I was getting ready to serve tea to her alone, for Mr. Hatherly and the brother-in-law was both off somewhere and Mrs. Wall up in her room with a sick headache——"

"When was this?" McCarty interrupted sharply.

"On—on Monday afternoon. Maybe I oughtn't to speak of it, but it's no harm!" Lizzie's color heightened and she tossed her head. "I wasn't snooping and they didn't try very hard to hide anything! Mrs. Hatherly was alone, as I said, out on the brick terrace when Mr. Norris called. I came out with the tea-wagon at the same minute that Mr. Buck climbed up the steps from the garden and the both of us saw that Mr. Norris was holding Mrs. Hatherly's hand and she was letting him! They drew apart quick, I can tell you, and Mrs. Hatherly talked and laughed a great deal but Mr. Buck was just furious and he didn't seem to care whether he showed it or not. I guess maybe there'd have been a scene only Mr. Norris took himself off as soon as he

could and then Mrs. Hatherly and her brother-in-law had it hot and heavy! I—I had something to do just inside the French windows and I heard the most of it. First she tried to kid him and told him not to be a silly boy and then she got mad and said he was to mind his own business. He told her his brother's business was his own and he was going to see that this thing was stopped right then and there. Then she started the crying act she always pulls on her husband and said he had insulted her and he called her a little fool and told her she didn't know when she was insulted. That made her wild for fair!"

Lizzie paused for breath and McCarty asked:

"What was the outcome of it?"

"Nothing, except that Mr. Buck left her in a rage and went tearing off in his car. I could see that she was worried and a little scared after he'd gone but when her husband came home she was all smiles and as sweet as pie to him during dinner and the little I saw of them afterwards."

"And when did Mr. Buck come home?" McCarty was gazing out over the water and he asked the question half indifferently as if the subject had lost interest for him, but Lizzie was too deep in her story to be halted.

"Not till after eleven. I know because me and Katie was both woke up by the thunder-storm and I'd looked at our alarm clock only a minute or two before we heard his car go shooting around to the garage. I don't know where he'd been but I guess there'll be no more nonsense between Mrs. Hatherly and Mr. Norris!"

"Why? All this has nothing to do with poor Mrs. Wall, of course, and what happened to her, so why should it make trouble between those two?"

"Oh, it didn't, as far as I know, but he called this morning and she wouldn't see him. She was sick, of course, with worry and trouble and the sheriff and the coroner both driving her crazy with questions, to say nothing of you, yesterday! She was really fond of Mrs. Wall, too, and the shock was awful, and then all this notoriety coming! I guess she didn't feel much like flirting with anybody, but Mr. Buck saw Mr. Norris. I don't know what happened between them for he took him in his den and they talked a good while. When Mr. Norris left he looked as though he could kill somebody himself, you'd hardly have recognized him! I don't believe he'll come to Hatherly House any more."

McCarty recalled again the glimpse he had caught of the man that morning, and understood.

"I wonder if he did really know Mrs. Wall before, and where they met," he ruminated. "Didn't you ever happen to hear a word that passed between them, Miss Lizzie, when they thought no one was listening?"

"No. It seemed as if they had a kind of an understanding, friendly enough but more like business, if you know what I mean.—Heavings, look how low the sun is getting! This is my afternoon off but I've got to be back in time to set my table for dinner."

"I'll walk to the highroad with you," he offered. "I won't go all the way to the house for it might get you into trouble if they saw you with me, knowing that the

coroner has let me butt into the case just out of curiosity. They might think I'd been trying to pump you."

"There's nobody can do that.—About Mrs. Wall, though, I'd be glad to tell the coroner himself if I knew anything. It's the most awful thing I ever heard of and me and Katie have been near sick over it ourselves!" She rose and waited while he pulled up and folded the umbrella, and then turned inland beside him. "We can't think why she went out, for no message had come for her, telephone or anything, and nobody saw her go."

"I wonder what time she did leave the house. It was a little after six when she sent your sister to Mrs. Hatherly's room with word that she wouldn't be down, wasn't it?"

"Around that time. She must have gone out while I was serving dinner, but she couldn't have left by the back way or the cook or somebody would have seen her, and if she didn't want anyone to know she'd hardly have been bold enough to try the front door.—Here's the path, see? It ain't as hard to walk in as the loose sand."

There was indeed a narrow but well-beaten path winding between the dunes, and McCarty asked:

"Who made it?"

"I don't know." The girl shrugged. "I only found it myself the other day and Mrs. Wall couldn't have come this way night before last, for the tide goes right up over that part of the beach where we were. Katie and me have talked it all over and we can't think how she got to that shack where you found her."

"But did you figure out how she left the house at all? If 'twas not by the front or the back——?" McCarty paused.

"Only by the side door that opens on the terrace and down the steps to the garden. There was no other way, for she'd have been seen from the dining-room otherwise; that is, if she went during dinner, while it was still light. We think she must have, because the squall came up just afterwards and she'd hardly have gone out in that, no matter for what reason.—You'd better not come any further. Hatherly House is just on the other side of the road."

"I've enjoyed this little talk, miss." McCarty tucked the umbrella under her arm. "'Tis too bad I can't carry that for you all the way. Maybe I could see you soon again? If there was a picture show or even an ice-cream parlor in the Cove——?"

"There isn't, there's just the beach." Lizzie dimpled at him as she held out her hand. "I'm not promising but perhaps I'll be down there again day after to-morrow in the afternoon. Good-by."

He stood for a moment watching her as she made her way over the dunes, and then turned back to the beach. So Mrs. Wall and Gilbert Norris were old acquaintances at least. This was an unexpected angle to the case but it explained, too, why Norris was so shocked when he learned of the identity of the slain woman. What could have been the nature of the "business understanding" between them? Could Norris be made to speak?

CHAPTER XII

HIGH STAKES

McCARTY returned to the Griscoms' and mounted the stairs to discover Dennis seated calmly in their room with his chair tilted back and his feet on the window sill. He wore an aggressively clean shirt, and the smile with which he greeted his friend was galling in its self-sufficiency.

"Where've you been?" demanded McCarty.

"To Plimptonport, for one, to get our baggage." Dennis waved a comprehensive hand at the litter scattered about the room. "I had a talk, too, with that dog-robber Pickens that soaked you sixty bucks for that boat, and it gave me a lot of satisfaction."

"Did you see Doctor Allen in Plimptonport?" McCarty attacked his bag with a grunt of relief. Dennis had not been fooling around Spindrift Cove and gumming up the game; that was some comfort.

"I did not." Dennis grinned. "So you found them too?"

"Found what?" McCarty glanced up suddenly.

"The tracks through the bog," explained the other. "Look at the pants on you, Mac! 'Tis ruined entirely they are, the same as mine."

"Have you been snooping around that shack?" Mc-

Carty straightened and dropped an armful of clothes. "Did you have a run-in with the sheriff? Denny, take that pipe out of your mouth and answer me! I want to know what the devil you've been doing since early morning!"

"Well," Dennis put his feet on the floor and brought his chair down with a slam, "I'm not denying that I had some words with that sheriff. He's as sore as a crab because the body was identified before he got here and he can't get anything out of the Hatherlys to work on. It was early this morning that I went down to the shore to have a look at the shack but there was him and Constable Bartlett too and they looked as if neither of them had got a wink of sleep. He gave me a piece of his mind about city fools butting in and when the constable tried to speak up it didn't help matters any. I was going to tell him where he got off, but I remembered what you said about his maybe nabbing us after the inquest on his own account, so I let on I was just passing by. I went, too, a good ways past and then I doubled back over the sand hills inshore and fell in the bog. That's how I found the tracks."

"And what did you do then?"

"I went to Plimptonport." Dennis spoke guardedly and appeared to be choosing his words with unusual care.

"You never walked it!" McCarty drew one of the despised local cigars from his pocket, lighted it, and, seating himself on the bed, he eyed his friend suspiciously.

"A good part of the way." Dennis tapped out the ashes of his pipe on the window sill. "A man came along with a load of vegetables to ship by freight and he gave me a lift. It was noon when we got there and I had a bite to eat at the Pilgrim House and then saw old Pickens and changed my clothes in that shack we'd rented from him before I started back."

"Carrying the bags, I've no doubt!" McCarty remarked sarcastically. Dennis was still holding out on him, there was no mistaking the signs, and it exasperated him the more because of his own lack of progress that day. The discovery of a mere cart track through the marsh would not give Denny that air of achievement which radiated from him, and his continued reticence was unprecedented. "You had a good walk the day!"

"I'd have come on my hands and knees before I'd take a boat, you can bank on that!" retorted Dennis. "As it happens, I hired a rig and a boy to drive me over. Have you found out anything, Mac?"

He could not conceal the eagerness in his tone at the question, and McCarty smiled grimly.

"I went into the marsh from the other end, near the highroad, and followed them down to the shore but I'd sense enough to keep away from the sheriff," he remarked. "I had a talk with that Thompson fellow and another with a lady this afternoon but barring a lot of scandal I got from her she only told me one thing that may be of use to us."

"A lady?" Dennis queried. "Not Mrs. Hatherly? She's over the first shock by now and it's little you or

the coroner'll be able to get out of her, I'm thinking, for she'll begin to wonder about Mrs. Wall and try to keep her own skirts as free from notoriety as she can."

"No, 'twas not Mrs. Hatherly," McCarty conceded.

"Then who in the world was it? Be a sport, Mac, and come across!" Dennis' air of self-satisfaction fell from him and all the old urgency was in his tone. "I've got some dope myself but I don't know how to make head nor tail of it and we'll get nowhere if we don't work together in the old way. Who was it you talked to?"

"A servant girl from the Hatherlys', the one that let Doctor Allen in yesterday when we called with him. She gave me an earful but it's a long story and the main thing is this: Mrs. Hatherly has been carrying on a flirtation with another man right under her husband's nose and though he didn't see it, of course, that young Buck did and gave her the devil and all about it just the afternoon before the murder. The man she's been carrying on with met Mrs. Wall at the house as though they were strangers but they weren't. The maid is positive that they knew each other before, and who do you think the man is, Denny?" McCarty paused impressively. "The one that stopped us in the big red car yesterday, Gilbert Norris!"

If McCarty had thought that his announcement would create an impression he was not disappointed. Dennis stared at him for a moment as if he could scarcely believe his ears, and then rose slowly.

"What's that you say?" he demanded. "This man Norris knew her before? Are you sure of it, Mac?"

"The girl Lizzie is, and she's no fool. For some reason they both kept quiet about it and Mrs. Wall was pleasant to the man but she tried to avoid him all she could, while he seemed to be puzzled over her. Lizzie said they acted as though they had some sort of an understanding and I took it to be a kind of a truce. But what surprised you so to hear that she and Norris were old friends?"

"'Friends,' is it?" Dennis exploded. "'Tis his house at the branch of the highroad that I've been watching most of this morning, for it was straight between there and the back of that cabin on the Point that the cart tracks run! I've traced them and what's more, a big covered wagon was seen to leave his gate the night of the murder and it turned west down the highroad towards the marsh.—Mac, do we let the coroner in on this now to maybe spoil the game before we've had a chance to see what's in it? I know we promised that if we found out anything we'd go to him or the constable with it but it seems a pity not to be handling it just by our two selves."

"And what have we found out—yet?" asked McCarty. "We've only the opinion of that maid who never heard a word that passed between them, and a few tracks in a bog! The inquest is to-morrow morning and we'll have to tell him what we can by then, but we've the night before us! Did you get a good look at that Norris yesterday?"

"I did not, except that he was about the build of young Buck Hatherly but much older and better looking. I got a flash or two at him this morning while I was hanging

around his place but 'twas only from a distance." Dennis' eyes were sparkling and his whole face alive with eagerness. "When do we start, Mac, and what's the first thing to be done?"

"We'll run over and see the coroner now." McCarty was hastily changing his clothes. "He sent a telegram this morning from Plimptonport that I worded for him and the answer ought to be here. Moreover, I forgot to ask him if his autopsy showed more definitely just what time Mrs. Wall was killed, and I want to look over some of those letters you read yesterday. If he should ask anything, you went to Plimptonport for the bags and I spent the day prowling around the shore.—Come on."

"Why did you ask if I'd got a good look at Norris, Mac?" Dennis inquired as they descended the stairs.

"Because I've seen him before myself, somewhere, and I can't place him. The name don't bring anything to my mind, it's the smooth, handsome face of him."

"Well," Dennis paused with his hand on the front door, "if he pretended to Mr. and Mrs. Hatherly that he'd never met Mrs. Wall before she came to visit, and she kept up the bluff too, we've only to find out what there was between them and where he was the night of the murder——!"

"Denny! Have you no sense that you would be mentioning names and telling your plans to the world, and us in the same house with that rat-faced reporter?" McCarty admonished quickly in a low tone. "We don't even know that he ever saw her before; Lizzie might

have been mistaken.—Look! There's the doctor on the porch, now."

A boy on a motor-cycle was just leaving the cottage opposite, and the coroner beckoned to them with the slip of yellow paper which he held in his hand.

"Maybe that's the telegram now, that you spoke about," remarked Dennis. "He looks kind of puzzled, don't he?"

McCarty chuckled.

"He would be, if it's what I expect, and be careful you don't yawp when you hear it, Denny!" he replied. "Good afternoon, Doctor. I was over earlier but you hadn't got back yet."

"I've had a busy day. Come on in, both of you." He led the way to the office. "I sent that telegram word for word as you told me, Mr. Doe, and here's the answer. You hit it right about those stories, but I don't know any more'n I did this morning! Listen: 'Randolph's opened again all places you mention except Bar Harbor. New syndicate management, head unknown. Wire any assistance wanted.' It's signed just 'Druet.' "

" 'Druet!' " Dennis remembered himself and coughed violently.

"I thought so." McCarty nodded. "Now, Doctor, if you'll just let me run through those notes and receipts and that check book of Mrs. Wall's, I'll be ready to explain."

"Here's the bag." The coroner gestured toward the table. "I've just been going over it again myself.—Your friend said you stole a march on him to-day."

He turned to Dennis and the latter flushed.

"I hear I missed you in Plimptonport where I'd gone for our bags," he responded noncommittally. "Did you perform the autopsy, Doctor? Mac said something about wanting to ask you if it fixed the hour of Mrs. Wall's death closer than your first examination."

"No, she was killed around nine o'clock or before." The coroner spoke absently, for he was still gazing down at the telegram in his hand. Then he glanced up. "It did show something, though, that I didn't see before on account of her hair being so thick; there's a bruise on the back of her head where she struck it when she fell. It ain't a mite of importance but we've got to be thorough in cases like this.—Through already, Mr. Doe?"

"Yes." McCarty closed the bag and came toward them. "This may have nothing to do with the murder and it's still got to be proved but I don't think that'll take much trouble. I got the notion first from those stubs of checks all made out to 'bearer.' Mrs. Wall was paying out money to people who either didn't want their endorsement to go through the bank or she herself didn't want anybody to get wise as to who she was paying it. It might be hush money but not steady blackmail, for the amount wasn't the same in any two checks nor was the time regular. Then I thought of gambling; when a woman gets that in her blood, Doctor, it's worse than the dope and there are more of them got the bug than you'd think, especially among the rich that are alone in the world with nothing to do and nobody to look after.

"The thought was in the back of my head when you took us to Mrs. Hatherly, and she made me more sure

by saying how Mrs. Wall wasn't ever bored or enthusiastic, never showing what she thought or felt unless she wanted to; that's the born gambler for you, with the card face! I took a shot in the dark then by asking if she was superstitious—never one lived yet that wasn't, —and about playing poor bridge. Naturally she couldn't keep up her interest in a friendly game where the stakes meant nothing when she was used to playing for thousands a night."

"You mean that she was a—a regular gambler for a living?" The coroner's fat jowls sagged.

"No, it was weakness; a plain vice with her and that's why she kept it secret. If people like the Hatherlys and lots of others she met around at the different resorts knew, they'd be shocked, of course, and she wanted to keep her place in society. Don't forget this is only a guess on my part but I figured that she only played when the fever was on her and then in the select establishments that run a separate room for ladies like her; those she met there would give themselves away by gossiping about her and she would avoid the men.

"Thinking of that kind of a place made me call to mind old Randolph; I don't know whether you ever heard of him or not down here but when he was alive he ran a chain of the most exclusive houses of that kind this country ever saw, all around the fashionable resorts of the East where the wealthy go, and that's why I had you send that telegram. Randolph's old shops, as—as the city police call them, are open again and going full blast in New York, Boston, Bretton Woods, and Great

Barrington,—all except in Bar Harbor. Of course he had a lot of other places too, but Mrs. Wall had been to New York and Boston and the three resorts and they were the only places she signed 'bearer' checks since she started this book, though none in Bar Harbor. They'd take the checks of regular customers, you know, but they would make pretty sure of them first."

"Sodom and Gomorrah!" Doctor Allen gasped. "I never heard tell of such doings in all my days! A nice, quiet woman like the Hatherlys thought she was, and not even interested much in anything!"

"That's one reason why I think I'm right about her, Doctor. Whether it's dress or babies, or outdoor sports or politics, a woman's bound to have some one especial interest in life if there's no man she's in love with and none has bobbed up in Mrs. Wall's case as yet. If her friends don't know what that interest is, you can bank on it that 'tis something she knows they'd disapprove of." McCarty paused, and after a moment he added: "Mind, I don't say it has anything to do with the manner of her death but it's my opinion Mrs. Wall played for pretty high stakes and you wouldn't have to go far from here to find one man who knew it!"

CHAPTER XIII

MC CARTY CALLS A BLUFF

"YOU'VE shocked the coroner, all right! I misdoubt, Mac, but that he thinks you have evil ways yourself, that you know so much about gambling!" Dennis remarked, when as soon as darkness fell they struck off across the common to the highroad. They had gone directly to supper from the doctor's office and there had been no time for confidential talk between them. "He may be narrow-minded but he knows his regular job; he patched that head of yours up fine."

"It's going to be worse to-morrow," McCarty replied. "It'll be all bandaged up again and most of my face, too. The coroner said the Pilgrim House in Plimptonport was packed full of city reporters and they'd hired every kind of a rig in the place to get over to the inquest to-morrow. If there should be a New York lad among the lot who would remember me he'd have a fine tale to carry back to Headquarters!—What was it Doctor Allen told you about Mrs. Wall's head being hurt, too? I was listening with half an ear as I looked over those letters in the bag."

"He said it showed the mark of where she fell, there in the cabin.—That gambling notion would never have

come into my mind in regard to Mrs. Wall but if it's the truth, then I'm on to who you meant by the man that knew it; 'tis the one we're going to see."

"Yes. 'Twould account for his being amused at her sitting in at a cheap little game of bridge and playing it poorly at that, but it would contradict other things unless——" McCarty broke off. "Who do you think I ran into right about here this morning? That half-wit, Sol, that jumped in front of the doctor's car yesterday."

Dennis shivered.

"He's a fearsome looking gawk!"

"But mild as a child, Denny; I found him playing with a bit of a cheap slipper buckle——" He was going on to tell of the woman who had run from the idiot just before the storm, but his companion interrupted.

"That's funny! Millie, back at the cottage there, has lost the buckle off a slipper; I heard Mrs. Griscom saying to her what a pity it was, whilst I was waiting for you to come home this afternoon.—Holy Mike! It's dark!"

McCarty hastily reconsidered. Surely the woman could not have been Millie, for she would have recognized Sol and not fled from him in terror! But what if she had not? What if she had been running home in such haste that she had not even seen the crouching, mouthing figure in the semi-dusk? It would be just as well not to speak of the woman until he'd had a glimpse of Millie's remaining buckle.

"I'm thinking it's a good thing for us that there's no moon, the night," he responded to Dennis' observation.

"That's why I told you to be sure to bring your flash-light with you. We'll be doing a little reconnoitering before we go to the house and announce ourselves to this lady-killer Norris."

"My reconnoitering will be done from the branches of a tree and on the other side of the wall at that if the dogs that I saw tied up there this noon are let loose at night!" vouchsafed Dennis. "Great murdering brutes they are! I wonder he keeps them! It's just a big, rambling old house he has, substantial looking but plain, and the grounds aren't all fussed up with summer houses and flowers the way a woman would have them, though they're well 'tended to."

"Did you see many in help?" McCarty asked as they turned into the highroad and started east.

"A couple of guys working around the garage that looked more like bouncers or sparring partners than chauffeurs, and a gardener who was a husk, too, and a big Swede woman that came out of the kitchen. They were all I lamped before himself tore in at the gate in his big car as though the devil and all were after him and I judged it better to make myself scarce."

"We'll not be finding him in any too good a humor to-night in my opinion, but that's all the more reason why I want to see him," McCarty remarked. "I think 'twas from the Hatherlys he was coming when you saw him, for he'd passed me about here on the road and according to Lizzie he'd had a run-in with Buck that made him good and sore. He'll talk, fast enough, if I can get him right."

Dennis flashed his light along the side of the highway.

"'Tis here, too, that the tracks of that cart lead over the marsh. The road itself is hard and the rain had washed all traces away, but in the daytime you can see half a dozen spots where the wheels slipped down into the ditch and hoof-prints marked deep where the off-horse of the team had floundered to get back on solid ground again. Whoever drove it would not have had to turn out for other traffic that late in the night, so you can guess what it means."

"They were traveling without lights, of course, but who told you they saw the wagon leave Norris's gate?" McCarty halted to light the stub of his cigar. "What time was it, anyway?"

"'Twas an old woman who lives in a bit of a cottage close by. I asked for a drink of water and got into talk with her, and as near as I can make out it was around eleven when she heard a crash and somebody swearing, and looked out the window. A flash of lightning showed her the wagon where it had run into the stone gate-post." Dennis pointed with his light. "There's her house just ahead on the other side of the road."

"If you'd told me we were so near I'd have saved my smoke!" McCarty grumbled.

"'Tis better wasted than kept, by the whiff of it!" The other sniffed disgustedly. "The Barnstable road branches off to the north right beyond her garden patch and facing it on this side is Norris's place."

A low stone wall had replaced the ditch on their right and presently they came to the posts which marked the

gateway. Lights glimmering between the trees ahead showed the location of the house, and as they proceeded cautiously along the drive the baying of deep-throated dogs broke forth suddenly. Dennis halted.

"They're tied up still, my brave lad!" McCarty assured him. "Can't you hear the sound of them is coming no nearer?"

"And what's to prevent somebody turning them loose now to see what's up?" Dennis glanced about for a convenient tree. "They must have second sight, for we've made no noise; they're better than a lookout!"

But the clamor gradually subsided and they went on, keeping carefully to the grass which bordered the drive until they were within a few yards of the house.

"Come around the far side," Dennis whispered. "There's something I want to show you——!"

He stopped with a gasp and stood blinking in the sudden glare of light which had burst forth upon them, bathing them full in its radiance. A curt, authoritative voice sounded in their ears.

"What do you want here?"

"We're looking to call on a Mr. Gilbert Norris, if this is the right place." McCarty advanced a step or two, and as his eyes became accustomed to the transition from darkness he made out the figure of a man standing on the veranda before the opened door. The illumination which had been turned upon them came from a huge search-light over the steps.

"I'm Norris. What do you want to see me about?" The words were clipped short and the figure did not move.

"We've come from the Cove; Doctor Allen sent us, Mr. Norris," McCarty explained. "Likely you saw us in the car with him yesterday when you stopped him to ask about the lady who was killed. We'd like a few words with you if it's convenient."

"Of course. Come in!" His voice had taken on a note of easy cordiality but it was still guarded and there had been the fraction of a pause before the invitation. "Why didn't the doctor telephone that you were coming?"

"Because of Central, I guess," responded McCarty significantly as they mounted the steps. "My name is 'Doe.' "

" 'Doe,' eh?" Norris laughed shortly. "And the gentleman with you is Richard Roe, I suppose?"

"No, sir; Riordan." Denny spoke up.

"Well, come this way and tell me what I can do for you." Their host switched off the great light and led them into the wide, low-ceilinged hall, quaint with its rag carpet and well-spaced pieces of rare old mahogany against the white walls. He turned to the right and threw open a door. "We'll go in here. Take a seat, gentlemen."

The room into which he ushered them was cozily lighted and spacious, with windows at the front and side and a huge fire-place at the back. Bookcases and racks of shot-guns lined the walls, a chess-board was set out on a low table beside a wrought-iron floor lamp and an ancient spinet stood in one corner. Nothing was particularly distinctive in its appointments but the very in-

congruity of the furnishings perhaps contributed to the atmosphere of careless comfort.

" 'Twas a bad business, that murder," McCarty remarked as he and Dennis seated themselves. Norris had taken up a position on the rug before the empty fireplace as he stood regarding them with a courteously inquiring gaze. "Our dory out of Plimptonport was wrecked offshore and I found the shack whilst looking for shelter, as you may have been told. That ties us up here until after the inquest, of course, and the coroner was good enough to let us in on the investigation with him."

"Very interesting, I am sure," their host responded dryly. "However, I'm afraid I won't be able to render any assistance to Dr. Allen and yourselves. I was shocked by the affair because I had met Mrs. Wall at the Hatherlys' on several occasions since she came there to visit but they told me very little about her. I understood that she was not a close friend of the family."

"No. It must have been a surprise to find her there," McCarty observed. "How long have you known her, Mr. Norris?"

Dennis blinked at the direct question, but Norris shook his head with a slight smile of disclaimer.

"I was presented to the lady, naturally, the first time I called after her arrival. Has any one given the coroner an impression that she was an acquaintance of mine?"

"Yes. It wasn't the Hatherlys, since they didn't know it themselves, but they've a staff of servants with sharp eyes and ears."

"Lord bless my soul!" Norris laughed amusedly. "Has our good doctor been listening to servants' gossip? My dear fellow, go back to him and tell him that I never saw the lady until I met her at the Hatherlys'."

"I couldn't do that, Mr. Norris." McCarty had been studying their host's face intently and now he smiled to himself as he added quietly: "You see, he got a tip from somewheres else besides to trace some checks for heavy sums she'd made payable to 'bearer' during the last few months and found that you and she had a lot of mutual friends in a different set from the Hatherlys' —the kind of friends, some of them, that'll squeal. I used to tell Billy Randolph myself in the old days that it was a mistake to take checks from a woman especially if she happened to be a steady patron but he wouldn't listen. The banks usually get leery and watch for the guy who comes to cash so many of them that don't need to be endorsed."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Norris eyed him steadily and frowned in a puzzled way. "If Mrs. Wall and I had any mutual friends we did not discover the fact in our brief chats, but it wouldn't be surprising."

"No, it wouldn't," conceded McCarty. "Not to us, of course, but it might be to some of them that will be at the inquest to-morrow. It might surprise them even more to think they recognized Bert North up here and heard what he might have to say. You see, there'll be a bunch of boys from the Associated Press and all over. That's why the doctor asked us to come over to-night.

He's a good sport, though you mightn't have had occasion to find it out before, and he don't want to spoil another fellow's game. I think he'd even like to tip off the boys in the syndicate that are running Randolph's chain up through New England to close down until after this murder is cleared up, if he had a chance."

Dennis almost choked as Doctor Allen's shocked face rose before his mental vision, but Norris only smiled and a rather sinister look came over his handsome face.

"That's funny," he observed. "I would never have taken the doctor for a sport and I thought I could spot them wherever I found them as easily as I could a plain-clothes bull!—Let's get down to business. What are you here for?"

"Fishing; we're on a vacation." McCarty had received the home-thrust imperturbably. "We don't want to hang around here for a long-drawn-out inquest, with witnesses that would never be called at all if the coroner could only get a line on Mrs. Wall without bothering to put them on the stand. He hasn't located her family yet, you see, nor where her income is derived from though it's a sure thing 'twas not from the tables! Being a country doctor and not a district attorney that's all he'd take on himself and call it a day when he could establish who she really was and send the case to the jury. She was Mrs. Josetta Wall, of course, but who was Josetta Wall?"

"I wonder if anybody knows much more than the Hatherlys do about her?" Norris spoke reflectively. "In my short and casual acquaintance with her I gathered the fact that she came from good stock but not of the position

in society that she held of late years. She'd passed the stage of being a climber, but she had climbed, all right. I don't think any of our mutual friends, if we had any, could tell you who her husband was or anything about him, but they would probably tell you that financially she was as solid as a rock although they were never able to find out the full extent of her capital nor in what it was invested."

"And they took her checks?" McCarty demanded. "Are you giving it to me straight?"

"Having known her for three years or more, I fancy they would, especially if they had confidential inside information from the trust company where she banked that her drawing account never fell below twelve to fifteen thousand and frequently doubled that amount. Of course such checks as—er—you have reference to are sometimes a risk to cash but there was never any hitch about hers. I am of the opinion that if one could speak of a lady as a good sport, Mrs. Wall was one."

"Where did you meet her first?" asked McCarty bluntly.

"She was out at French Lick three years ago last autumn and except for short trips abroad she seemed to spend her time going from one smart resort to another, each in the height of its season. She always traveled alone with a maid and frequently one of her cars but never kept the same maid or chauffeur longer than two or three months, and I don't think she was ever known to have a social secretary or a companion. She had a wide circle of acquaintances, of course, but

no intimates and I do not think that any man held more than a passing interest or amusement for her.—I'm giving it to you straight as a die!" Norris added. "She was a mystery to all of us."

"She was a pretty consistent loser, though, wasn't she?"

"By no means. She had streaks of luck that couldn't be stopped and I'd be willing to wager that she died away ahead of the game although she has lost a small fortune lately. Shouldn't wonder if she'd let her account get pretty low this time. Her play was erratic like most women and often she bulled her luck too far."

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

"Last Saturday night, when I played bridge at the Hatherlys. I called there Monday afternoon but she had a headache and was resting." Norris seemed to have thrown aside all ambiguity and his tone was the essence of candor. "God! I never had such a shock in my life as when I heard the murdered woman was she, and Allen confirmed it! I can't realize it even yet! I wish I could help you on her account as well as because that tip to put up the shutters was damn white of you, even though the word has already gone out. I never heard of her having an enemy in the world. I've wondered ever since she came what she was doing down here, for—well, she was a different sort, and she wouldn't have spent half a day in a wilderness like this if there hadn't been a motive behind it, as any fool could see. I put it up to her in a joking way when I got a chance and she tried to kid me that she needed the rest, but she fought shy of

me; our meeting was a mutual surprise, I don't mind telling you, for you've called my bluff. I don't think she was any too pleased, either, to find me hobnobbing with her friends, for she'd only known me in a business way, of course, but we let the begs go as they lay. She must have been up to something deeper than I dreamed but I'd like to get my hands on the beast that killed her!"

"The coroner's got to have an account of the whereabouts on the night of the murder of everyone down here who knew her even as casually as you did through the Hatherlys' introduction," remarked McCarty. "You were the only one outside of the household who saw her more than once or twice and if I could tell him what you did from the time you left the Hatherlys on Monday afternoon, it would leave you altogether out of the case as a witness."

"I didn't do a thing!" Norris laughed with a flash of his white teeth. "Came home and looked over some new magazines, and dined and smoked and went to bed. Not much of a program, is it? I haven't any friends staying with me now but my servants can testify to that. Hilda must have gone to bed but I'll call in the men if you like."

"Your word's enough." McCarty rose. "Those dogs of yours must be terrors from the noise they made when we'd no more than set foot inside your gate! Do they do it whenever any one goes in or out of the grounds?"

"Any one they don't know. They're turned loose at night occasionally but they never leave the place."

Norris turned to lead the way out into the hall once more as he spoke, but McCarty stopped him with a hand laid confidentially on his arm. "I don't suppose you know where Buck Hatherly spent the evening on Monday? He left the house soon after you did and never returned till eleven, as will likely be brought out at the inquest to-morrow. Of course if he has an alibi too he'll be bothered with no more questioning than the rest of the family but if it happens that he hasn't——?"

Norris's face flushed suddenly and a hard light came into his eyes.

"I don't know where he was, the young puppy!" he exclaimed. "His brother Bill is all right but that prig——!" He caught himself up suddenly. "Look here, you don't mean to say that he can't give an account of himself?"

"We haven't asked him yet." McCarty paused at the door. "Good night, Mr. Norris. You'll not be bothered again."

Norris held out his hand.

"Good night, Mr. Doe. Keep me out of it if you can and if you would like to call in to see me in a day or two——?"

McCarty shook his head.

"Nothing like that," he interrupted quietly. "Thanks just the same but we'll be off on our fishing trip by then. 'Night."

Their host forbore to turn on the blinding white light but the glow from the opened door behind him illumined

the driveway for a short space, and as they came down the steps of the veranda a figure slouching under a tree slunk away quickly, but not before both had seen him.

"That wasn't one of the help, that I lamped to-day," Dennis remarked. "The dogs must know him, though; they're keeping quiet."

McCarty did not reply. He recognized the truculent fisherman who entered the little tobacco shop from the rear that morning and practically ordered him out of the place. What was he doing here and why had he attempted to avoid observation?

CHAPTER XIV

AMONG THE DUNES

"I'M surprised that you let him off so easy, Mac," Dennis commented as they walked down the drive toward the gate, with the renewed clamor of the dogs in their ears. "If I'd thought I could open my mouth without putting my foot in it there's a question or two he would have answered for me! He was lying about Monday night!"

"Sure, he was," McCarty returned good-naturedly. "And what was the use of getting his ill-will by doubting his word after me making us solid by passing the tip about closing up the gambling houses for awhile?"

"And you letting down the Inspector, after he gave the dope in confidence to the coroner!"

"Because I knew the minute I recognized Norris as Bert North that the word would already have been passed so no harm would be done. They'll not take a chance on having the investigation into the past of one of their star customers leading to their door." McCarty laughed. "Mind that gatepost, Denny! We'll not use our flash lights till we get to the end of where the stone wall runs."

"Who's North, anyway? He's one of that gambling

syndicate of course that have opened up Randolph's old places, but how did you know and what's he doing down in this out-of-the-way hole?" Dennis' tone was distinctly aggrieved. "Wasn't it me put you on to him? I make all the balls and you fire them!"

" 'Twas the girl Lizzie gave me the tip on him first, you'll mind, but I knew his face from the first time I laid eyes on it though I couldn't place it!" McCarty retorted. " 'Tis years since the old Tenderloin days when I was one of the boys under Captain O'Connell who raided his shop more times than one, and I heard not long since that he'd worked his way up to near the top of the gambling fraternity, though keeping mighty quiet himself and lying low. I put two and two together and figured he was in that Randolph syndicate, for Mrs. Wall seemed to have played only in their establishments and she wouldn't have known him as one of the suckers but an owner. She'd only sit in the semi-private games with women like herself. The main thing you put me wise to, you didn't know yourself!"

Dennis stopped short in the road.

"What the devil——?"

"Didn't you tell me about his watchdogs and say they were better than a lookout? Why does he keep two chauffeurs when he drives himself, and tough, husky lads at that, who could put up a good scrap in a raid? Did you get that search-light that could sweep all the front of the grounds? I'll bet there's another at the back. Do you recall, too, what the coroner said about the parties of men he had down for the fishing and the rumor that

had gone around the neighborhood about their playing cards all night, to say nothing of the constable being on his trail for stocking up his cellar? It's fishing his friends may be doing on the side but he's running a private little gambling club for men in that old farmhouse, and caters to an exclusive crowd that's the pick of society, or I miss my guess! They'd be big fellows who couldn't afford to be seen even in Randolph's and the sky would be the limit with such a bunch.—That's neither here nor there, though. Here's the end of the wall; come on."

"Where're we going?" Dennis asked doubtfully. " 'Tis as black as your hat and if we get stuck in the marsh or quicksand, maybe——!"

"There's none hereabout. Get down against the side of the wall, Denny, and keep your trap shut!" McCarty ordered. "I want to see if we're being tailed."

They crouched down and Dennis felt surreptitiously at the belt of his trousers beneath his sweater. He had secreted there a short but business-like wrench purloined from Pickens' shack in Plimptonport that day, for his experiences on former excursions with McCarty had taught him the wisdom of having a weapon handy; and he relied more on a quick blow with a convincing argument at the end of it than a wild scattering of shots in the dark. The night wind bore a tang of the sea and little swirling eddies of sharp, dry sand which stung their faces. Behind them the tall grasses on the dunes rustled like husky, whispering voices.

"For what would he have us followed if he thought

we believed his story about Monday night and that we knew nothing of that cart without lights that went from his house to the shack?" Dennis forgot the warning for silence. "What if we are being tailed? We've got nothing to do but go back to the Cove, for we'll find out no more here this night with those dogs on the job!"

"Hush!" McCarty cautioned. "Peep around the corner, Denny. Isn't there a bit of a light creeping along the highroad from the gate?"

On hands and knees Dennis crawled obediently forward and craned his neck around the wall. Then he backed precipitately.

"'Tis a lantern with only a glimmer showing, that's bobbing along close to the ground," he reported. "Whoever carries it is walking, Mac. Shall we let him pass and then jump him?"

"For what? Walking on the road where he's as much right as ourselves?" whispered McCarty. "I'm thinking it will be that guy who was skulking under the tree when we said good night to Norris and if so he may have good reasons of his own for keeping his eye on us. We'll return the compliment and find out where he goes to when he sees we've given him the slip.—Here he comes!"

The faint, dipping glow from the lantern was plainly visible now and growing brighter, and the scuffling footsteps of a single pedestrian could be heard on the hard road. It was evident that he was proceeding cautiously, for at brief intervals he halted and the thin ray of light darted inquiringly ahead. Then he reached the end of the wall beside which they crouched and they saw the

vague outline of a gaunt, unkempt, slouching figure which plodded heavily on with no pause for a glance in their direction.

When his footsteps had all but died away McCarty straightened.

"We'll be after him now, Denny, but keep close to the side of the road and throw yourself flat in the ditch if he stops and that light shoots back," he warned. "I doubt but he thinks we've kept straight on."

The man ahead was apparently uncertain, however, for more than once he halted in the next quarter mile and the ineffectual light turned gropingly in their direction, causing them to take precipitately to the ditch.

"I've no other pants between me and New York!" Dennis muttered. "There'll be mud and gritty mold from top to toe of us, and what if that lout only went to Norris's to chin with some of the help and is on his way home to the Cove? He looked as though he might be one of the fishermen from there. Suppose he does see us? He got a flash at us when we left the house."

"He'd not be so curious about us if he was going straight home, for he knows well who we are," McCarty responded. "Aren't we near that place where the cart tracks lead into the marsh?"

" 'Tis right there—and he's stopping. The lantern's gone out!—Now we've lost him!" Dennis exclaimed.

"Not while we've got the flash-lights, but we don't want to use them unless we have to." McCarty quickened his pace. "The lantern's not out, he's just covered the light for a bit. If you're sure that's where the tracks

turn off he'll probably uncover it again before he goes far in that marsh, no matter how well he knows it! I'd not give him credit for over-much gumption but he may be waiting there for us to pass him, the way we waited for him back there. If he is we'll just have to walk on by, the same as him, and then double back."

There was no further speech between them as they crept on warily until Dennis caught McCarty's arm.

"Here's where the cart left the road, and there's no sign of him," he remarked. "If he's a native and took to the bogs we'll never be able to follow him, light or no light, and what's there to see now that we didn't to-day?"

"Plenty," McCarty replied briefly. "We've got to tail him if we get up to our necks in the muck! Keep just behind me, Denny, and watch for his lantern to show up again anywhere around."

Holding his flash-light close to the ground, McCarty turned it here and there in the ditch until the hoof-prints and deep ruts of wheels were located and then followed them into the marsh with Dennis at his heels. They were forced to proceed at a mere snail's pace, for more than once the tracks were lost in the quaking ooze or shifting sands and there was still no sign of their involuntary guide.

Dennis stepped unexpectedly into a water-hole and extricated himself with a profane comment.

"It's my opinion he's back somewhere on the high-road still, giving us the laugh!" he declared. "Moreover, maybe there's a track that branches off from the one I followed this morning and it's little we could tell in the

dark whether we were on the right one or not.—Did you notice if he carried a gun?"

"'A gun?'" McCarty stopped and turned. "A rifle, do you mean? He had only the lantern, that I saw. Why?"

"I'm not wishful to make a target of myself and there'd not be much talk of a stray gunshot out here in the marshes so near the season. I'm going to have a look around for that guy."

Reaching up, he gripped a tuft of coarse grass which grew on a high hummock of sand and scrambled to the top where he stood for an instant sweeping the flash-light about him, and then exclaimed under his breath:

"There he is, away over to the left! He's not following any track at all but jumping from one ridge of solid ground to the next, as you can see by the dip of his lantern, though he's working his way towards the shore. What'll we do? If we leave the cart track and then lose sight of him again we'll be floundering around till morning!"

"Then flounder we will!" McCarty announced grimly. "Don't train your light right on him more than you have to, for we don't want him to know we're after him; just spot him now and then and flash it off quick. The shine of his own lantern will confuse him. Come along, if we have to swim for it!"

Dennis set his teeth and sliding down the hummock he plunged into the morass with McCarty close behind. Plowing over loose sand, splashing and wading through pools and stagnant canals and sinking knee-deep in the

treacherous ooze, they pursued their chase while the ungainly will-o'-the-wisp ahead seemed to be waving his lantern mockingly at them, and the distance between did not decrease.

McCarty, whose late years of prosperous ease had left him out of condition for such a strenuous effort, was soon breathing heavily and reeking with perspiration, but he toiled doggedly on in the wake of his lean, wiry companion who showed no effect of the strain although he negotiated the obstacles awkwardly enough.

It seemed as if they had fought their way for miles through the marsh and McCarty was wondering if they would never reach the shore of the Sound, when at last the spongy ground beneath their feet gave way to loose rolling stretches of dry sand with sudden, deep depressions and hillocks, which rose as abruptly to a height above their heads. On the summit of one of these Dennis halted so unexpectedly that McCarty collided into him and slid back into the hollow.

"What is it now?" He sat up and brushed the sand from his eyes. "You might be warning me, Denny, when you're going to stop like a blockhead in my path!"

"Hush!" Dennis whispered back sepulchrally. "He's stopped too, right on the edge of a flat place with boards over it. There! He put his lantern on the ground and took off his coat! Now he's lifting up the planks; there's a big hole underneath! What's he going to do?"

Dropping on his stomach, he wriggled back until only his head surmounted the top of the dune, and McCarty

crept up beside him on his hands and knees and peered over the ridge.

The rays of the lantern, stationary at last, revealed a deep basin in the circular declivity of the surrounding dunes; in the center a wide, irregular cavity had been dug, its sides shored up and the sand trampled all about it save where it had been flung in a heap. A low pile of boards, with coils of rope, tackle and a spade or two, lay beside the hole, and over this the angular figure of their quarry had stooped, casting weird, elongated shadows into the deeper shade of the pit.

"He's picked up a shovel; he's going to dig!" Dennis nudged his companion. "Look, Mac, what's he after?"

"Nothing, except to cover up what's there, and 'twill be no evidence of the murder, I'm thinking!" McCarty was chuckling softly. "He's shoveling that pile of loose sand back into the hole and if he means to fill it up he's got some job before him!"

"What's there funny about it?" demanded Dennis. "How do we know what that hole was dug for?"

" 'Twas not for the body of Mrs. Wall, if that's what you've got in your mind!" McCarty raised his head. "Isn't that the water I hear just there to the south of us? Go and see, Denny; you have your light and I've got mine so we can't lose each other and the lad down there will be busy for a good while yet.—See, too, if there is any kind of a track from the beach that leads back here into the hollow."

"We-ell," Dennis slid reluctantly down the slope be-

hind them and regained his feet, "I'll just take a look around but I'll not be gone long. If that guy beats it and you trail him, flash your light now and again so I'll know which way to follow you."

He turned and vanished into the darkness while McCarty continued his espionage of the bent, toiling figure below him. The man was working in apparent haste, swinging the sand-laden spade with long, powerful sweeps of his wiry arms and pausing at every few strokes to glance furtively about in the radius of light cast by his lantern.

The hole had been too deeply in shadow for McCarty to see whether anything had rested in it, but it filled rapidly beneath the man's efforts and when he had leveled it to the surface he stamped it down carefully, then sifted loose sand over his own footprints.

McCarty began to wonder if Dennis would return in time when he heard a low, warning cough behind him and a long, lanky shape crawled up cautiously by his side.

"The Sound is just over a couple of sand hills to the south, Mac, and there's a track from here," he whispered. "We're not a quarter of a mile from the cabin on the Point, too, for though 'tis late I can see a few scattered lights from the village behind it; and, what's more, a dory with two or three men in it is just pulling in below on the beach!"

"Then, we've no time to lose," McCarty remarked. "We've been hunting a mare's nest to-night, Denny, but it explains several things that have bothered me

ever since we butted into this affair. I know now why the coroner and the constable were so particular to find out if we'd really started from Plimptonport for Mattagansett just to get tobacco on Monday, and why they were both suspicious of us even after they took the handcuffs off us and asked us to help them dope out how the murder was done. You'll mind I told you there was more in this than you thought?"

"Yes, but I don't get you!" Dennis wriggled uneasily. "If Mrs. Wall wasn't murdered in Norris's house that night and the body brought through the marsh in the wagon——!"

"I don't say it was nor it wasn't, but I'm wise now as to why the constable was prowling around that shack at midnight on Monday and why the fellow down there that's winding the rope and tackle over his shoulder gave me such a black look when I ran into him in a store in the village this very morning." McCarty struggled to his feet. "Come on and we'll surprise him before his friends in the dory come to join him!"

"We'll have to rush him, then," Dennis warned. "Look out for a swipe with that shovel!"

He pulled the wrench from his belt as they plunged down the side of the dune with the loose sand following them like an avalanche. The man stood staring stupidly at them for a moment as they advanced upon him; then with a curse he dropped the lantern and raised his spade.

McCarty dodged nimbly to one side in the darkness but Dennis hurled himself forward like a catapult, winding his long arms about the body of the other man and

bearing him to the ground. When McCarty flashed his light upon them they were rolling over and over in the sand. Just as the man reached for his pocket, Dennis lifted the murderous-looking wrench.

"Stop! Don't brain him, Denny, twist that wrist of his till I get the knife out of his hand." McCarty had leaped with surprising agility upon the struggling pair. "That's it, I've got him covered!—None of that, now, or there'll be a bullet through you! Denny, see can you find that lantern of his and light it and we'll tie him up with his own rope!"

The man swore and struggled futilely for a moment longer but the glint of the flash-light on the revolver in McCarty's hand made him fall back and lie there in sullen silence.

The lantern was found and re-lit, and Dennis advanced once more to take the coil of rope from the man's shoulders when all at once he spoke.

"Damned revenooers! Spotted ye when ye fust landed, upsettin' that thar dory an' purtendin' ter be wrecked in the squall! Ye——!"

"Wha-at!" Dennis paused in amazement. "What's that he's callin' us, Mac!"

"There's been a misunderstanding all 'round, I guess." McCarty laughed. "If I've got the right of it, there's more than fish comes in with the boats now and then and this is a little private cache here where it's hidden and carted away through the marsh. How about it, my lad? Speak up!"

"What for?" the man demanded sullenly. "Ye got me, hain't ye?"

"Looks that way but I'm not sure that we want you, not if you'll tell us a few things we're here to find out," responded McCarty. "We're not revenue men and though we're respectable, law-abiding citizens ourselves 'tis none of our business if you want to go around digging holes in the sand! We've seen nothing here but a rope and a few bits of board."

"Ye'll make no fool out o' me!" retorted the prostrate one. "I calc'lated ye'd be 'long pretty soon because o' them complaints old Eb Bartlett's be'n gittin' 'bout the rum-runnin' 'long shore, but he never would've caught me!"

"It's you that's making a fool out of yourself!" McCarty retorted shortly, for he feared every moment that the arrivals from the dory would intrude themselves on the scene. "I'm telling you that we've nothing to do with that, though we can hand you over quick enough to the constable if we like! Tell us what we want to know about last Monday night and we're likely to forget that we ever followed you into this marsh."

"Ye mean that?" The man sat up slowly. "Ye'd let me go?"

"If you'll come through with the truth. We needn't tie him up yet, Denny, though I'll keep him covered to see that he doesn't give us the slip. Let's get back to the highroad, the three of us, and have a little talk."

"Ye hain't lyin'!" A ray of hope shot through the

man's dull eyes. "Ye be'n't revenooers, after all! I don't know nothin' 'bout the murder, ef that's what ye mean, but ef ye let me go I'll tell ye ev'rything I kin 'bout Monday night!"

CHAPTER XV

DENNIS TAKES THE WHEEL

THERE was little talk on the way back to the high-road, for Dennis was occupied in adjusting his slow-moving mind to the new development in the situation and McCarty was keeping strict guard over the man who went in advance, jumping sure-footed from hummock to hummock and taking his course through the morass with the accuracy of long habit.

They emerged at length upon the solid ground of the highway, and flashing his light about McCarty described a pile of rotting telegraph poles by the side of the road.

"We'll sit here where nobody's around and we can talk," he suggested. "The stuff comes on a schooner that stands offshore and a dory brings it in to the beach, don't it? You help the men unload and store it in that place in the sand hills till you get a chance to cart it away. Is that right?"

"I wouldn't never hev took ter it but the fish hain't be'n runnin' an' Susie, she's poorly, an' the store don't pay," the man remarked in reply.

"Was it Susie I bought the cigars from this morning?" McCarty asked.

"Yes. I'm Eph Tisbury an' she's my sister. She never wanted I should hire out fer it an' sed nothin' 'cept tribulation would come but the pay was good an' I only hed ter haul it through the marsh ter—ter——"

He hesitated and McCarty supplemented:

"To Mr. Norris's place. We know. Was the schooner due Monday night?"

Eph nodded.

"She hed ter run afore the squall but they was some crates yit in thet hole an' I calc'lated I'd cl'ar 'em out 'gainst the next load. Mr. Norris gits a sight o' it but he don't use only mebbe a little; he sends it away off somewheres in ottermobiles."

"I thought so, but it isn't all by yourself you do the carting, is it?"

"No. One o' Mr. Norris's hired men cuts acrost ter the hole an' meets me ter help carry the crates ter where ye see the track o' the wagon. We can't git it no nigher; hev ter go cl'ar through ter the sand ter turn, clost ter old Zenas's cabin." He broke off, shaking his head. "I heard tell Doc says thet woman was killed 'bout nine o'clock an' the shack set a-fire, but it wasn't more'n half past nine when I led the team up pretty nigh to it on this side an' turned 'em, an' there wasn't no light in thar a-tall, lantern, ner fire, ner nothin'. I calc'late the shack was empty, too, fer the door was bangin' back an' forth in the wind; I heard it plain."

In the rays of Eph's own lantern McCarty was studying the man's weather-beaten face closely but it showed only puzzled thought.

"You turned and went straight back in the same tracks to the spot nearest that hole?"

"Yes. They ain't no other trail where a team kin git through the marsh an' we can't take more'n eight or ten cases at a load 'count o' the heft. Pete—the man from Norris's—was waitin' an' we loaded up; he driv' back with me most ter the highroad, ter lend a hand when the team got stuck, an' we was more'n an hour gittin' out o' the marsh."

"Do you remember looking back at all? Did you see any light that might have come from the shack?" McCarty persisted. "You drove without lights yourself after you got clear of the marsh, didn't you?"

"Mr. Norris told me to. The wagon's mine, that I use ter cart fish in, an' I keep it an' the team in Hobham's barn, back a piece." He jerked a thumb toward the west.

"Past Hatherly House?" McCarty asked quickly.

"No, just 'bout half way this side, 'twixt thet an' the Cove. It was when I was goin' after it afore the squall come up, thet I see Mr. Norris, but he didn't see me." Eph hesitated and spat, then fumbling nervously he pulled a plug of tobacco from his pocket and bit off a generous section. Dennis shifted his position in impatience, but McCarty maintained a discreet silence and after a moment the other went on: "He was standin' by the side o' the road talkin' to a woman."

"Who was she?"

"I don't know. I didn't look real close, just went on by. She hed on a long coat an' somethin' dark tied 'round her head, an' afterwards I thought mebbe—some

say——" He paused again but McCarty, with a quick look at Dennis, remarked easily:

"You thought it might have been Mrs. Wall? Perhaps it was, Mr. Norris knew her.—You went on to the barn and hitched up and drove to his place——?"

"What fer would I go there till I'd brung the cases from the marsh?" Eph interrupted him and his dull eyes looked full into those of McCarty. "I waited in the barn till the first blow was over an' thet's why I didn't git to the shore afore nigh half past nine, an' it was rainin' pitchforks then. They wasn't nobody on the road then, ner on the way to Norris's an' back."

"Did you drive straight back from the Norris place with your team and put it up in the barn?" McCarty asked.

"Yes. Thet must hev be'n 'round eleven an' the thunder-storm thet followed the squall was 'bout over." Eph reflected for a minute. "I was to hum an' in bed afore twelve an' when I woke up an' heard Eb Bartlett shoutin' an' all the racket Susie didn't want I should go out. She was scairt Eb hed found thet hole nigh the marsh an' I hed ter stop an' argufy with her ter show her 'twould look mighty strange ef I didn't turn out with the rest ter see what was wrong. Eb was comin' back with the Doc when I went down ter the shore an' see the lanterns 'round the cabin an' Mr. Thompson was thar outside lookin' kind o' sick. When I see what was in thar I felt like keelin' over myself!—Thet's ev'ry livin' thing I know, Mister. I don't know who you be but it's gospel truth I've told you."

"Does this man Hobham rent you space in his barn for your team and wagon?" McCarty was sifting the details of Eph's story. "Was he with you there whilst you waited for the first of the squall to blow over?"

"Cy Hobham's be'n dead these thirty year." Eph shifted his quid from one gaunt cheek to the other. "His widow's a pretty old woman, an' she hires out the hull barn ter me, an' don't ask no questions 'bout when I come an' go. They was a light in her kitchen but I didn't see her a-tall Monday night."

"Did you see Mr. Norris when you brought the cases to his place?"

"He was waitin' ter see they was put away right. Pete hed follered 'long behind the wagon a ways, so's we wouldn't be seen together on the highroad, an' he got to hum afore I finished unloadin'. Mr. Norris was waitin' down here fer the cargo from the schooner but she must hev be'n run off by a gov'ment cutter, 'cause she hain't dropped anchor offshore sence." Eph spat once more. "Seemed like I see a rocket go up when I was on my way through the marsh but I wasn't sartin."

"Why were you filling in that hole, then, in such a hurry?" Dennis could contain himself no longer. "Did Mr. Norris tell you to? Why was it you were at his house to-night when you'd nothing to deliver?"

"I went ter tell him the schooner hain't put in, an' he sed when it did I wasn't ter bring nothin' more ter the house but keep it hid out by the marsh till I got word from him. He's goin' away somewheres fer two-three days." Eph had turned to his second question. "When

I see ye leavin' him an' recognized ye fer the revenooers I hed took ye ter be, I went quick's I could ter cover up thet place in the sand an' take away my tackle. I left it there soon's it was dark ter be ready ef the schooner hove to, same's I done last night."

"You said Mr. Norris was waiting for you to come with the cases Monday. Was he dressed the same as when you passed him earlier in the evening on the high-road?" McCarty took up the inquiry once more. "How did he act to you? Was he flustered or anything?"

"He was madder'n sin 'cause I hadn't got there afore, storm er no storm, an' he kin cuss good's anybody thet ever put to sea; hed me on the jump gittin' them cases stowed away in the cellar, I tell ye!" Eph paused. "He hed on some kind of a dark suit o' clothes on the road but no big coat like he wears in the ottermobile an' thet night when I got to his house with the cases he wore a pair o' old light-gray pants an' a sweater.—I—I hope I hain't makin' no trouble fer him, tellin' thet I see him talkin' ter thet woman. Mebbe it wasn't the same but the coat on the one layin' dead thar in the cabin afterwards looked like her'n. Mr. Norris never hed nothin' ter do with the killin' though, I'm sartin. He's got a temper like a nor'easter but he wouldn't hurt so much ez a stray dog. I wouldn't want ter hev ye b'lieve nothin' wrong from what I tell ye. I done it only because it's the truth an' ye sed ye'd let me go——"

He spoke slowly as though it were difficult for him to express himself and there was a note of distress in his tones.

"We're going to." McCarty got to his feet. "If we find it's not the truth you've been telling us, and the whole of the truth, we'll put the constable on to you but otherwise I guess we'll forget what we saw this night. Eh, Denny?"

Dennis agreed with alacrity and cutting short Eph's broken thanks they sent him on ahead of them to the village.

"Is it back you're going to have it out with Norris?" Dennis demanded excitedly when the bobbing lantern had disappeared down the road.

"Have what out?" retorted McCarty. "'Tis the word of that fisherman that he saw him in the road against Norris and all of his help to back him up that he stayed home from dinner time on. How could we prove that Eph was there at all that night? There's only the old woman who saw his wagon when it hit the gate-post and how could she swear it was him in the dark? Norris talked a-while back because I called his bluff, but it'd be us that would be bluffing now and he'd just sit tight."

"He admitted he knew her before and never let on to the Hatherlys!" Dennis was fairly prancing in the road. "Wasn't he the last to see her alive of any one we've found and didn't he change his clothes before Eph saw him again? If the suit he wore has blood stains on it——!"

"How are you going to find it? Poison the dogs and burgle the house, with the search-light he's got and the arsenal we saw in that room and his three tough guys

waiting for us?" McCarty interrupted in scorn. "What if he did meet the woman and talk to her, is it a sign he killed her that he didn't mention it afterwards? 'Tis one thing to admit to us he's connected with the syndicate running those gambling houses where Mrs. Wall played but another entirely to confess he was with her a couple of hours before her dead body was found, whether he's innocent or guilty! He's not sure yet if we took his alibi in good faith, but he don't know we're wise to that meeting; that's the only advantage we've got over him now, that he thinks he's playing safe."

"But he's going to make his getaway!" Dennis exclaimed in disgust. "You heard what Eph said!"

"He'll not go alone," McCarty responded grimly. "'Tis the devil's own luck that I've got to be the first witness at the inquest to-morrow but we can't get the coroner to postpone it without putting him wise to the little we do know, and he'd be gumming up the game for fair. It's not the verdict of his jury that matters now, Denny, but the truth of who killed the woman. Come on!"

"Is it back to the Griscoms' to bed you're going, then?" asked Denny in bitter disappointment as he reluctantly followed his companion, who had turned villageward. "It was the truth I spoke before ever this case came up that you'd lost your old spirit!—But you said Norris would not make his getaway alone; who is going with him?"

"You are." McCarty did not turn his head

"Me?" Dennis stopped short in the road. "Have you

lost your wits? If he's not gone already he's got that scooting devil of a car——!"

"And you'll have another. Thanks be, you can drive it! 'Tis Buck Hatherly's I've in my mind, and by all accounts it should give dust to that big lumbering ark of Norris's. We'll go to Dr. Allen now and make sure Norris hasn't beaten it yet, and then we'll get the doctor to borrow Buck's car."

"And what then?" Dennis' voice shook with elation not unmixed with self-doubt. "If I wait outside Norris's gate till he drives off and then trail him and he hops a rattler somewhere——?"

"Hop it with him. Don't lay off him for a minute, and wire me when you get a chance.—If that's as fast as you can walk, Denny——!"

Dennis needed no urging and they reached the coroner's cottage to find a light still burning there, though most of the others along the little street had been long since extinguished. Doctor Allen admitted them, and if he noted the bedraggled state of their attire he made no comment but waited expectantly.

"Doctor, I've gone further than I ought, maybe, in using your name, but I'm going still further," McCarty began. "There's a last chance that we can give you some real information before the inquest but if we can't 'twill be better late than never, and you and Constable Bartlett will be getting it, not the sheriff nor the rest from the county seat. Would you be willing to telephone two people for me and say what I tell you, asking no questions just yet?"

The coroner gathered his comfortably shabby old dressing-gown more tightly about his rotund form, regarded his guests contemplatively for a moment and then turned to the telephone.

"Calc'late I would. Sheriff's been here to-night, lording it all over me and letting on he's got his case cut-and-dried a'ready, and Eb Bartlett's on the p'int of having a stroke. The inquest is going to be like a meeting of the sewing circle, all gab and nothing done, I'm afraid, but I'll be more'n willing to take kind of a back seat if we can show afterwards that Spindrift Cove can rock its own cradles and bury its dead. Who'll I call up?"

"Mr. Gilbert Norris first; you'll know his voice, of course. Be sure it's him, and then thank him for seeing Denny and me to-night, and say he needn't appear at the inquest," McCarty replied. "I think he's waiting to know but I'm not sure; he's got important business in town."

Mystified, the coroner called the number and, after an interval of suspense for his visitors, they heard him repeat the message.

"That was Mr. Norris for certain, but I calc'late I didn't hear him just right." Doctor Allen turned his small, bright eyes on them questioningly. "It sounded 's if he said I was a 'bird'! What's the other message?"

"It's to young Mr. Hatherly, Doctor." McCarty paused to cast a wary glance at Dennis, who was coughing violently. "Ask him to lend you his car, that fast gray one he drove yesterday morning, and to see that 'tis all primed with gas and oil and grease. Use your authority and commandeer it if you have to, but get it down in

a hurry. It's Denny that'll be driving it and maybe we'll not hear from him for a day or so. That car's worth a tidy bit of money and you don't know us, but you'll have me as surety till I can get a bond here——"

"I'll chance it," the coroner interrupted briefly. "If I can get confidential information from police headquarters in New York through what you told me to-day, I calc'late I can trust you."

He turned once more to the telephone and Dennis whispered:

"If he should take it into his head to call up and ask the Inspector about Denny Riordan and Mac, no matter whether the last name is 'Doe' or mud, he'll likely bring him up here to find out what is it you've bumped into now!"

"Whist!" warned McCarty. "'Tis you will have the bumps and the fun of it till the inquest is over and I can get in touch with you again."

They waited then in silence until the doctor rang off with the announcement that the car would be on its way in five minutes.

"Buck Hatherly said I could keep it if I would find out who was responsible for the death of Mrs. Wall," he added. "I can't understand why none of her relations have come or sent any word; it's more than twenty-four hours since the news of her identity was given out to all the big city papers. I telegraphed from Plimptonport to all the folks, too, whose addresses were in those letters and the ones who answered at all pretend they only had a slight

acquaintance with her.—You can see for yourselves."

He rummaged through the papers upon his desk and handed a sheaf of telegrams to McCarty, who glanced over them, nodded, and passed them to Dennis.

"All running for cover, on account of the notoriety.—Did young 'Buck' tell you yet where he was himself on Monday night? You'll recall, Doctor, that Mrs. Hatherly said he went out before dinner and I've heard he didn't get home till eleven."

"He says he just took a ride and the car broke down out near South Orleans in the storm. If nobody comes forward, even to claim the estate, how are we to find out the truth about Mrs. Wall?"

In desultory fashion they discussed the case until a motor dashed up to the door and the Hatherlys' chauffeur climbed down from behind the wheel.

"I'll walk back, sir." He addressed the coroner, who had followed his visitors out to the porch. "Mr. Hatherly said to keep the car as long as you like."

The others caught only a glimpse of his short, stocky figure in the glare of the lamps before he hurried off up the street. McCarty turned to Doctor Allen:

"You'll see me first thing in the morning.—Come on, Denny, I'll be going a ways with you."

"You're coming out to Norris's place, Mac?" Dennis asked as they turned and shot off towards the highroad.

"I'll keep watch for you till the morning, for it's sleep you'll be needing now if you've a long chase before you." McCarty's tone was filled with envy. "You're at the wheel now, Denny, and heaven help you if you skid!"

CHAPTER XVI

MC CARTY GETS A WIRE

WEARY and stiffened in every joint after a fruitless, night-long vigil at a discreet distance from Norris's gate, McCarty awakened the snoring Dennis and with a few final directions took leave of him to tramp back to the Griscoms' in the chill, wind-swept dawn. Early as it was, he found the girl, Millie, stirring about the kitchen, and the savory odor of coffee and frying ham greeted him.

"Wherever have you been?" She turned from the stove with a little smile, but the circles about her eyes were deeper than before and her lips trembled slightly. "I saw your room door standing open as I came down and nobody inside. Don't you want your breakfast now before you go up if you're going to rest awhile until the—the inquest?"

McCarty accepted gratefully, and as she placed the steaming food before him he remarked:

"I hear you teach school over in Wareham in the winter, Miss Millie. Would you be having any of your books here with you, geographies and such?"

"Oh, yes. They're up attic." She paused. "Did you

want to see a map, Mr. Doe? The ones in the books are awfully little and the roads aren't marked plain but Doctor Allen had some for his automobile——"

"It's not local ones I'm after, of the Cape hereabout, but of different states." McCarty swallowed half a cup of coffee at a gulp. "The roads don't matter. I just wanted to find the location of a little town up around New Hampshire or Vermont but if it's too much trouble——?"

"Not a mite. I'll get my biggest geography right away." The girl hurried to the door, then hesitated. "If—if your friend comes in while I'm hunting for it, please tell him to help himself to some breakfast. I won't be long."

She seemed to wait for a reply but McCarty merely nodded in assent, and as he heard her soft footsteps going up the stairs he wondered anew whether she might not have been the woman who ran across the Common before the squall.

When she returned, bearing a large, flat volume that had evidently seen much service, he had finished his meal and was pacing the floor in impatience. A general bustle and stir overhead proclaimed the fact that the household was preparing to descend, and he wanted above all things to avoid the newspaper correspondent from Barnstable.

"It took me longer than I thought it would." Millie spread the book open on the table before him. "Here's New Hampshire and I've put a mark where you'll find the Vermont map."

"Thank you, ma'am. If you don't mind, I'll be taking it up to my room to look over." He turned down the page and closing the book tucked it under his arm. "Didn't I hear your aunt saying something yesterday afternoon about your losing a buckle?"

"Yes. It was off one of the slippers I got for commencement at the school." The girl looked up in surprise. "Have you heard of anybody finding one? It was just cheap, of course, but real pretty; square, with little stones that shone like diamonds——!"

Millie caught herself up suddenly and her blue eyes darkened as she added:

"What made you ask me, Mr. Doe?"

"You dropped it when you ran from the highroad toward the village the other night," McCarty replied slowly. "Don't you remember? It was just before that squall came up."

"I——!" The color came and went in her cheeks. "You mean the night that—that you were wrecked in the storm? But I wasn't out there! If somebody found a buckle it isn't mine!"

"Sol Whitaker has it. He picked it up when you dropped it and called after you, but I guess you didn't hear." McCarty's eyes never left her face. "It's just like what you describe, Miss Millie, and he recognized you."

She laughed with a little catch in her breath and turning away began gathering up the dishes.

"That poor, half-witted thing! Somebody else may have found my buckle and dropped it where he picked it

up but I wasn't anywhere near the highroad that night. I—I don't know when I wore those slippers last but it doesn't matter; I've thrown the other buckle away."

So it had been Millie, after all! The falsehood was palpable but what motive lay back of her denial? As he plodded up to his room McCarty shook his head doubtfully. The girl must have run from the highroad at about the time Mrs. Wall left the Hatherlys' if she slipped out while the family were at dinner, but there was no thread of connection between the two women, who, so far as he knew, were not even acquainted. It was conceivable that Millie had witnessed the interview between Mrs. Wall and Gilbert Norris, but what could that matter to her? She was interested in Buck Hatherly, but according to his story he was then driving aimlessly out toward South Orleans, and had the girl been merely hurrying to reach home before the storm broke there would have been no reason for her to deny it. What had she seen, there on the highroad?

McCarty spent a good half-hour poring over the geography, but when he at length threw himself down upon the bed, it was with a sigh of satisfaction. If Norris continued to sit tight or Dennis lost him, a plan was already forming itself in his mind.

By nine o'clock the highroad was clogged with rattling motors and straining teams. So densely were they packed before the gates of Hatherly House that it was with difficulty a path was forced for Doctor Allen's small car.

McCarty sat beside him with his head and most of

his face covered with fresh, white bandages. The doctor had made no comment when he requested the superfluous adornment, but there was a knowing light in his small, beady eyes as he complied and he asked no questions about Dennis or the borrowed car.

The lawns were trampled and the veranda of the house crowded with a heterogeneous throng of fishermen and farmers in their Sunday clothes, with here and there a figure in the more conventional attire of a small town or city. Nudges and curious stares greeted their arrival and there was a salutation or two for the coroner, who nodded and hurried into the hall with his companion at his heels. There they parted, and McCarty sought an inconspicuous corner from which he scanned the gathering with anxious eyes. There was Prentice of the *Mercury* and Goodhue and Miner and the dean of them all, old Joe Rodney. Why should the murder of a woman in a lonely cabin on the shore of Cape Cod have brought so many big fellows of the press away out from New York, even if the dead woman had held a transitory position in the floating population which made up society at the various fashionable resorts? Were they playing up the mystery in which Mrs. Wall's past seemed to be shrouded? He blessed the forethought that had suggested the disguising bandage, despite the suspicion it might have aroused in Doctor Allen's simple mind, and resolved to give his testimony in as low a tone as possible. They should not have the laugh on him!

The inquest was held in the huge living-room which had been stripped bare of furniture save for the chairs

placed in regular rows. It was packed to the doors when the proceedings opened, with McCarty, as he had anticipated, the first witness called to the stand. He testified succinctly in a barely audible voice and the jury, picked at random from the aggregation of local folk, had no questions to offer or were too abashed at the unexpected prominence of their own positions to utter them. A murmur of interest and still unsatisfied curiosity pursued him as he left the stand, and Prentice and old Joe edged their way determinedly toward him, but he made his escape and ensconced himself in a turn of the landing, midway the stairs, from whence he could look down over the heads of the crowd and into the living-room.

Several of the fishermen from the Cove were called in turn to testify to the appearance of the deceased when they had rushed to the shack following the constable's alarm. And then Mr. William Hatherly took the stand amid a subdued hubbub from the spectators.

He proved to be a tall, well-set man, a good ten years older than his brother, but his dark hair was tinged with auburn and had the same irrepressible wave and his homely, pleasant face bore an unmistakable family resemblance. He gave his testimony in a grave, deeply modulated voice, relating their meeting and subsequent acquaintance with Mrs. Wall and the circumstances attendant upon the invitation extended to her for the visit, which had come to so tragic an end. But his story brought no new light to bear upon the situation from McCarty's point of view, nor did that of his wife who followed him. Her replies to the coroner's kindly-voiced

queries were faltered in a faint, quivering tone scarcely above a whisper, and she shrank visibly from the gaping stares focused upon her.

Only one impression, which had remained nebulously with him since their interview two days before, was intensified in McCarty's mind when, her ordeal over, Mrs. Hatherly gave place to her brother-in-law; she was concealing something. It might be no fact or even surmise which would aid the investigation but merely a vague fear or suspicion of her own; yet her furtive anxiety was apparent to his experienced eyes.

Buck Hatherly still looked worn and pale beneath his coating of freckles, but his voice and manner were as gravely composed as had been that of his brother; and the assemblage had begun to shift restlessly at the continued reiteration of testimony when all at once the coroner asked a question which brought a hush of expectancy.

"You say you left the house on Monday evening at six o'clock in your car. Where did you go?"

"Nowhere. I meant just to drive around."

"For how long?"

"I didn't plan ahead to return at any particular time, Doctor." Buck's clean-cut jaw tensed a trifle. "I hadn't any idea in mind."

"Not even your dinner?"

A subdued chuckle was heard among the spectators but it subsided before the deepening gravity of the young man's demeanor.

"I didn't think about it; I wasn't hungry. I just

drove on and then it grew dark and I realized there was a blow coming up."

"How fast were you going?"

The question surprised Buck into a naïve rejoinder.

"At a pretty good clip, I guess. I usually do."

Emphatic murmurs of corroboration, not wholly complimentary, arose from his hearers but the coroner quelled them with a stern glance.

"Did you drive straight to South Orleans from here?"

"I didn't go there, I just happened to be near there when the car broke down." A dogged note had crept into Buck's tones. "I'd been driving around through the country without noticing what roads I took or where I was."

"And you didn't turn back when the squall came up over the Sound?"

Buck shrugged.

"No. I didn't mind a little rain. I rode right on through it until I broke down. I don't know what time it was, I didn't think about it." A surly light came into his eyes. "I couldn't tell you how long it took me to fix the car, but I was half-way home when the thunderstorm came, following the squall."

"Mr. Hatherly," the coroner's fat cheeks seemed to sag still more as he put the question, "did you see or speak to any one you knew from the time you left the place here until you returned?"

Buck flushed hotly, and he paused for a moment. Then he threw back his head with a short laugh.

"Want me to establish an alibi, do you, Doctor? Sorry

I can't accommodate you. I didn't see any one I knew or speak to a soul, and I couldn't even take you to the exact spot where the car broke down or tell you what time I got home, but the storm was still keeping up although it had begun to pass over. I put up the car, got some crackers and cheese and fruit from the pantry and then went to bed."

Doctor Allen shook his head and turned the witness over to the jury. During their jerky, aimless questioning, which only served to emphasize the devil-may-care defiance that Buck had assumed, McCarty's eyes were drawn to the far side of the room. Sheriff Amasa Hite lounged against the wall, his slaty gray eyes fixed upon the younger man and a derisive smile creasing his angular jaw, while beside him Constable Bartlett tugged at his tuft of chin whiskers and shifted his heavy feet uneasily.

Noon recess followed upon Buck Hatherly's testimony, after which the coroner took his jury to view the scene of the crime, and it was two o'clock when the hearing was resumed. During the interim after dinner at the Griscoms' McCarty walked down the highroad to the Norris place. Dennis and his borrowed car were gone.

The servants at Hatherly House were the only witnesses remaining to be called and when the maid Lizzie had given her testimony, carefully expunged of all reference to the confidences she had reposed in McCarty on the previous day, he slipped out of the door leading to the terrace and started rapidly for the Cove, well knowing what was coming.

He was half-way across the common when the coroner himself drove up beside him in his dilapidated car and remarked briefly:

"'S all over. 'Murder by person or persons unknown.' Get in."

At eight that evening the two were closeted together in the doctor's office, when they were joined by a third who shambled in wearily and slumped down on the haircloth sofa.

"Wal, here we be!" Eb Bartlett turned his faded eyes from one to the other. "Inquest's over with, Sheriff's hot-foot for evidence agin Buck Hatherly, the woman's a-layin' unburied an' unclaimed, an' we're no nigher to findin' out who killed her'n when I bu'sted inter the cabin!"

"Buck Hatherly never did it!" Doctor Allen brought his fist down upon his plump knee. "I know you're down on him for speeding, Eb, but he'd never commit murder! Why in time should he, a woman who was a stranger to him ten days ago? What evidence can Amasa Hite get against him?"

"Calc'late he c'n work enough to git him indicted, mebbe," the constable responded gloomily. "Buck be-n't helpin' himself none by the stand he's took, I tell ye! Why sh'd he go out without no dinner, rampagin' alone 'round the country in the storm fer hours, an' then fergit what roads he took an' what time it was an' ev'rything? They ain't no sense to it, Doc! 'Course I know the young scalawag didn't kill her, but who done it?"

The coroner turned bright, inquiring eyes upon Mc-

Carty, who sat deep in thought, a flat, battered volume upon his knees and his gaze fixed on the black walrus bag with its flaunting labels, which once more reposed beneath the piano.

"We began at the wrong end to find out." He aroused himself. " 'Tis not in that shack on the Point you'll get track of the murderer but through knowledge of her life and them that had cause to love or fear or hate her, and I'm thinking you'll get it only through that bag."

"I've telegraphed to everybody——!" the coroner began, but McCarty shook his head.

"They're all friends like the Hatherlys, more or less, and it's little you'll get from them, Doctor, nor from the trust company nor yet her tenants in Maple Hill. It's not the letters inside but the bag itself I'm talking about. Would you look at that bit of a yellow label still sticking to this end of it and shiny with glue? '—n's Express', and below that, '—esboro' and underneath again, 'hire'; that's all you'll read, for the rest of it was torn off with some other label that had been pasted on top. There wouldn't have been that much left if it hadn't been covered up and forgotten, for if you'll look at the other end of the bag you'll see where another has been scratched off with deep gouges and broad scrapes that cut into the leather but there are shreds of the same yellow paper left yet. Where that bag went, Mrs. Wall went too, and she destroyed the label because she wanted no one to know she'd been there."

With a rheumatic hop the constable had lighted beside the bag, and he turned it for Doctor Allen to see.

"Great Jehoshaphat! It's what Mis' Wall's friends hain't known 'bout her, not what they hev, that counts! But thar ben't no way o' gittin' the rest o' what was printed on that thar label——?"

"Why not?" McCarty had opened the flat book upon his knees. "'—n's Express' means some little, small concern, not one of the big companies, and that sounds as though it might be a village—a village ending in 'esboro.' New Hampshire is the only State in the Union that ends with 'hire,' so it oughtn't to be hard to locate that village. I've got Miss Millie's geography here and I found there's a 'Hillsboro' and a 'Greenboro' marked on the map of New Hampshire, but no——"

The raucous jangling of the telephone bell broke in upon him and jarred his listeners from their absorption. The coroner replied to it and then exclaimed over his shoulder:

"It's a telegram for you from the Plimptonport office, Mr. Doe, sent in my care. Shall I take it?"

"Yes!" McCarty leaned forward, suddenly tense, and Eb Bartlett tweaked his whiskers excitedly.

"What's that, Jim?" Doctor Allen was talking into the transmitter. "Mr. Mac Doe . . . Yes, I heard you, he's here. . . . 'Framed and pinched. Come get me.' Signed 'Denny' . . . Yes, where's it from? . . . *Where——?* . . . All right."

He hung up the receiver and turned slowly.

"That telegram was sent from Dalesboro, New Hampshire!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE PHOTOGRAPH

IT was mid-afternoon on Friday when a thick-set, prosperous looking individual with a close-cropped, sandy mustache and genial blue eyes alighted from the Boston waytrain at the little Dalesboro station. Behind it, a straggling village converged in a hollow surrounded by green, rolling hills with the faint, misty outline of mountains beyond them to the north, and a noisy mill-stream foaming and chattering beneath a trestle close at hand.

No other passenger had descended; yet the driver of the solitary hack made no move to gather up the reins which dangled over the dashboard but awaited with abstracted indifference the approach of the stranger, who bore a large brown paper bundle in lieu of luggage.

"Where's your jail?" inquired McCarty, briskly. "Which way is your courthouse, son?"

"Jail's over to Colchester." The lad chewed reflectively on the straw which protruded from his loose lips. "Court's held next door ter the barber shop up Main Street."

"Then where'll I find your sheriff or constable? Court must be over for to-day but a friend of mine is in some kind of trouble here——"

"Feller in a gray ottermobile?" The lanky youth was galvanized into sudden life. "Hy Gilford got him in a speed trap yesterday—he come a-whoopin' through from Concord way. Stranger in 'nother ottermobile—gre't, big, red one, 'twar—give Hy the warnin' an' he caught him 'tween here'n the Falls. He's death on them speed hogs, Hy is."

"Where is he now, the man that was pinched—arrested, I mean?" McCarty demanded. "Is he in jail or did they let him go?"

His informant snickered.

"Paid two fines, he did; one fer speedin' an' t'other fer sassin' back in court. Reckon he's over ter the huttel."

But the stranger from the city seemed for the moment to have forgotten the object of his quest. He was staring with all his eyes at a faded sign which hung over the door of a one-story, unpainted structure across the road. It bore in time-stained lettering the legend: "Dorkin's Express."

"The hotel, you say?" McCarty roused himself. "Where'll I find it?"

"Right up street." The youth sat forward and reached for the reins. "Drop ye off thar fer ten cents on my way ter the stable."

McCarty accepted the proposition but raised it to a quarter when they jogged up to the steps of the ramshackle Belknap Hotel and he beheld Dennis sitting in moody solitude at the end of the porch. With his feet on the railing, he was puffing furiously at his pipe.

The feet came down with a thud when he recognized the new arrival and he brandished the pipe indignantly.

"So you got here at last!" he exclaimed. "You took your time about it, Mac! It's life I might have got from that hick judge this morning for all of you!"

"Did you think I'd a flying machine, and you and Norris off in the only two cars in that part of the Cape that'll go over four miles an hour?" McCarty retorted. "'Tis a hard character you're getting to be, Denny, pinched twice in four days!"

"And why wouldn't I be, the company I keep?" demanded the other bitterly. "'Twas a fine job you gave me, chasing that blackguard Norris! Wait'll I lay my two hands on him! He tipped off the constable to frame me for speeding and I couldn't get the thick-headed rube to see that Norris must have been going faster than me, since he was ahead. Did I call that galoot who rented us the dory a dog-robber? Man, he was a philanthropist compared to the chin-whiskered grab-all that fined me! 'Twas a rare session we had in court this morning, but I've lost Norris, bad cess to him, after hanging on his trail from dawn till dark——!"

"Never mind, Denny, he's maybe done us a good turn without knowing it." McCarty pulled up a chair beside that of his companion and produced a fat cigar. "I'm thinking it was Bretton Woods he was heading for but he shook you off at a burg that's not on the map, though Miss Millie's geography was published in 'ninety-nine——"

"What in the world are you hovering about?" Dennis stared.

"The label; the torn bit of a yellow label on Mrs. Wall's bag that I've got here." McCarty lowered his voice as he indicated the package on his knees. "Do you call to mind my asking Mrs. Hatherly if Mrs. Wall ever mentioned going to a little village in New Hampshire? The name of it ends in 'esboro' same as this and this bag has been to it more'n once, if she hasn't. I'm wondering if that Dorkin, who runs the express by the station here, uses yellow labels?"

"And you sitting here smoking at your ease!" Dennis rose hurriedly, his indignation forgotten and an eager light in his eyes. "Why didn't you speak of it in the first place? I suppose the inquest came to nothing, but haven't any of Mrs. Wall's relations shown up even yet? Wait till the news gets out that she died a rich woman!"

"But did she?" McCarty reflected aloud as they descended the porch steps and started down the street. "Maple Hill is a fashionable suburb of Philadelphia and if she owned her house free and clear it must be worth quite a bit, to say nothing of a few thousand always in that trust company in New York, but that's not wealth in these days, Denny. We know she had an income and a pretty big one, that she could be as extravagant as she was, but where did it come from? We've no trace of her capital yet, and as for heirs coming forward, real ones or impostors, they'll be in no hurry till the mystery of her death is cleared up."

"Whoever did it, 'twas not for robbery, nor yet be-

cause of a love affair, for there's been no hint of a man in the case and that would be the first thing we'd have got wind of. 'Tis a wonder, a young, fine-looking widow woman like that." Dennis broke off to ask abruptly: "But why would she be coming to a dead-and-alive little village like this one, her that was used to the liveliest resorts in the country, to say nothing of the gambling? If you started a game of dominoes here you'd get ten years!"

"If it's here she came—and mind you, 'tis only a wild guess on my part,—it's because there was somebody she wanted to see or *had* to see. 'Twas not for amusement or her health, any more than she went to the Hatherlys," McCarty responded. "I said there was one of two reasons why she fished for that invitation to the Cove all of a sudden; either she wanted to meet somebody there, or get away for a while where she couldn't be found. If she went to land on Norris for something and then couldn't see her way clear because he was a friend of the Hatherlys, well and good, but if she went to hide herself away——?"

"She left the house of her own free will and sneaked out at that, didn't she?" Dennis argued.

"Sure she did but how do we know what message or sign might have reached her unknown to them in the house, ordering her to come out? If 'twas from Norris he'd hardly have stopped to talk to her in the highroad when Eph Tisbury saw him, deserted as it was otherwise, but that's neither here nor there. She may not have known just who she was going to meet, or maybe was

afraid of tramps or such, since she took off her rings and string of pearls at the last minute. You see, Denny, we've got to feel our way in this case, we've so little to go on. It's back in the past, and that part of it she kept hid from her society and sporting friends, that we'll lay our hands on the truth."

They had reached the dilapidated express office, and a little old man with horn-rimmed spectacles and a shining bald head looked up from the ledger spread on the end of the counter, his gaze falling automatically on McCarty's package.

"Where tew?" He opened a drawer and produced a yellow label. "Hope ye got it wrapped up good. Hain't responsible fer no damage——"

"I don't want to send this anywhere." McCarty nudged Dennis, whose bulging eyes were fastened on the label. "It went astray and I thought maybe you'd remember who expressed it from here and where it was going to."

"Let's hev a look at it." The old man pushed his spectacles up on his wrinkled forehead. "Hain't got so much trade sence the parcel post come in thet I mightn't reecollect, mebbe."

McCarty put the package on the counter and started to unwrap it.

"You've sent it from here more than once, Mr. Dorkin, if I'm not mistaken and you wouldn't see many like it around this part of the country."

"By crickey, it's Josie's!" Dorkin's voice cracked.

" 'Tain't her'n, precisely, but it's the one Mis' Wall lends her when she comes hum tew visit."

" 'Mrs. Wall!' " Dennis' lantern jaw dropped. "J—Josie, did you say?"

McCarty, too, was thinking of Buck Hatherly's cry when he saw the body of the dead woman in the coroner's cottage, but he gave his companion a warning glance.

"We can't find Mrs. Wall at the address you sent it to last," he remarked.

" 'Twar the same address ez before, Admiral Huttel, New Yeork City!" the old man retorted testily. "Josie writ it out herself!"

"Who is 'Josie'?"

"Old Silas Fremont's gal. She works down tew the city but comes up tew see him reg'lar naow, though time was when she didn't. Mis' Wall's a rich woman thet's be'n mighty good tew Josie, I calc'late. She's a smart, up-an'-comin' gal, though, Josie is, allus one tew make friends thet was likely tew be useful." Dorkin cackled shrilly and then his expression suddenly sharpened. "Who be ye?"

"Where does Silas Fremont live?" McCarty ignored the question.

"First street over, third house down by the mill-stream; got hollyhocks out in front an' a trumpet vine, ye couldn't miss it." He peered with increasing curiosity at them. "What dew ye want tew see him for? He's be'n pretty nigh helpless sence his last stroke an' ef it hedn't hev be'n fer Josie, calc'late he'd hev gone tew the County

Farm, but she's be'n a-doin' fer him right along these last years. She'd otter, beln' his gal an' earnin' good wages, though it's s'prisin' she hain't got married. City fixin' makes a sight o' difference but Josie allus was a big, fine-lookin' gal, han'somest in these parts.—Who did you say you be?"

"We found the bag and heard it came from here, so as we were passing through we thought we'd bring it an' maybe you could tell us where it belonged," McCarty explained glibly. "How was it this Josie Fremont didn't take the bag away with her instead of expressing it?"

"She did, 'cept when she wasn't goin' straight back; then she sent it on ahead. It's 'bout six weeks sence she was here last but thar ben't no ways o' tellin' when she'll come ag'in, or I'd offer tew keep it here fer her. Want I should send it on ag'in?"

"No. We'll be back at the Admiral Hotel ourselves inside of a week and we'll leave it there for Mrs. Wall." McCarty produced a cigar similar to the one he had lighted previously. "Have a smoke, Mr. Dorkin?"

"Much obleeged tew ye." Dorkin sniffed it appreciatively. "Calc'late I'll keep it fer Sunday. Leave the bag here ef ye feel like it, an' stop by fer it on yer way back, mister; ef ye hedn't hev found it Josie would've took on dretful, 'count o' it belongin' tew her friend, though I calc'late she could save up ter buy another, on her wages."

"Thanks. I will leave it here for an hour, then, if you don't mind." McCarty dropped the bag down over

the counter. "Lots of country girls make good in New York. What kind of work does this Josie do?"

The old man shook his head.

"Couldn't say. Heerd tell she studied nursin' er somethin' but she give it up long ago. Josie ben't no young critter any more; calc'late she's thutty or tharabouts but ye'd never think o' callin' her an old maid like ye would ef she'd stayed tew hum.—Ef I'm at supper when ye come back fer the bag, just holler; I live right out back."

The sheer stupendousness of their discovery held them dumb for a few paces after they had left the express office, and then Dennis exclaimed in an awestruck voice:

"By the keys of Saint Peter! Out of the whole state of New Hampshire that Norris had to double-cross me here! You don't think he knows, do you, Mac, that this was Mrs. Wall's home town?"

"No. This happens to be within forty or fifty miles of Bretton Woods, though, and he didn't want you hanging on to him any longer, Denny. We'd have found it in time if we went to every village in the state whose name ended in 'esboro'; it was the only shot left in the box, the only clew." McCarty chewed hard on the butt of his cigar. "Here's the first street over and there's the mill-stream just ahead. Don't be counting your chickens before they're hatched, for we've only just started and I'm thinking we'll travel a far road before we connect Josie Fremont with the woman dead there on the Cape. Her own home folks think she's still single and working for a living and she took precious good care her society friends didn't know there was such a place

as this on the map. She overdid it once, though; remember she told Mrs. Hatherly she was glad to go to Bretton Woods because she'd never been in New Hampshire in her life before? I ought to have smelt a rat right then."

"Why didn't she let on she was married, do you suppose?" Dennis asked. "Was it ashamed of her people she was, or of the husband, maybe? If he was a gambler like Norris only without the manners of a gentleman, and a strait-laced one at that, she'd never bring him to a gossipy, narrow-minded hole like this, no matter how rich he was."

"Norris would have heard of him if he'd been one of the boys, Denny." McCarty shook his head. "'Tis my opinion that if there ever was a Francis Wall there was something even more mysterious about him than about her.—There's the third house, the one with the hollyhocks, and somebody's sitting on the porch."

"It's an old man with a shawl across his knees and pillows back of him; I thought it was a woman first," Dennis remarked in a low, excited tone. "Dorkin said he was a cripple, this Josie's father; how're going to tackle him?"

But McCarty strode ahead without reply, to pause at the gate and take off his hat.

"Good-day to you, sir! Is it Mr. Fremont I'm speaking to?"

"Come in," called a quavering old voice. "Mind the loose bricks in the walk. Ef it's mag'zine subscriptions, though, er soap——?"

"It isn't, sir." McCarty laughed. "Shut the gate behind you, Denny, and mind you don't tread on the pansies. We've found the right place; this is Miss Josie's father."

"'Josie?'" The thin tones rose eagerly.

"Yes, sir. My name's Doe and this is Mr. Riordan. We're friends of your daughter from the city and when she heard we were motoring through Dalesboro she made us promise to stop and see you." McCarty had halted at the foot of the porch steps. "Pretty little place you've got here, sir."

But the aged man did not hear the observation. He struggled as though to rise, then sank back helplessly and stretched out a palsied hand.

"Friends o' Josie's!" he repeated. "I'm mighty glad ye come! Draw up them two chairs an' set a spell while Lyddy gits supper.—Lyddy!"

"Don't trouble, sir. We can't stay, thank you," McCarty protested, seating himself nevertheless. "We only stopped for a few minutes to see how you were. Miss Josie said it was over a month since she'd been here."

"More'n thet; it's six weeks but ye tell Josie I'm still a-kickin'!" Silas Fremont smiled, displaying a double row of suspiciously white, even teeth. "Josie was lookin' good, too; she's just like her ma was. I got a picter on the parlor mantel——"

"What ye want now, Uncle Si?" A sour-faced woman of middle age had appeared in the doorway. "Ef ye keep on a-callin' I'll never git my work done——!"

She paused, staring at sight of the strangers, and Fremont waved his shaking hand.

"Friends o' Josie's from the city, Lyddy! Bring a gre't big pitcher o' good, cold root-beer from the cellar an' cut some fruit cake.—But git me thet picter o' Josie first, from the parlor." As the woman nodded and disappeared he added: "None o' Josie's friends come ter see me afore! It was real good o' ye ter stop by; folks from the city allus seems ter be in sech a hurry. Josie don't no more'n come hum fer a visit than she's off ag'in!"

"I guess we're all pretty busy, Mr. Fremont," McCarty ventured. "We'd like to see that picture of Miss Josie; I don't remember that she ever showed us any of herself."

"She won't hev none took. Josie's queer, thetaway." The old man was watching the door impatiently, and McCarty noted that his linen was immaculate and his wrinkled face freshly shaven. "I be'n beggin' her fer a picter fer ten year; this is when she graduated from the Academy, in her white dress an' all. I made a lady o' Josie, give her the best.—Here it be!"

The woman had reappeared, wiping a small, framed photograph carefully on her apron, and McCarty took it eagerly from her hand. It was cheaply finished and fading but one glance was sufficient.

The face of the girl smiling back at him was immature and childishly rounded, with the innocence of wide-eyed youth, but it was unmistakably the face of the woman lying dead in Spindrift Cove.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE YEARS BETWEEN

DENNIS drew his breath sharply at sight of the picture and McCarty remarked in haste:

"It's a very good likeness, sir. I'd know her anywhere. This was taken when she graduated, you say?"

"Fourteen year ago, an' Josie hain't changed a mite!" The white head was lifted proudly. "I promised her ma I'd put her through the Academy, an' I done it. I was just clerkin' when we got married but my wife hed taught school three terms over ter the Falls, an' she wanted Josie should hev a good edication. Ef she'd hev lived mebbe she could hev got Josie ter teach, too, but the gal was set on gittin' ter the city, an' Boston wouldn't do, it hed ter be New York."

"Well, New York's a pretty nice town, Mr. Fremont." McCarty smiled genially.

"Reckon 'tis; I hain't never be'n thar. I bought out a hay an' feed store up on Main Street when we'd saved enough, an' I was too busy ter go gaddin', an' after Josie's ma died, seems 'sef I didn't want ter. I was makin' plenty fer Josie ter stay ter hum an' be a lady, with a hired gal an' all, but she wanted more, ter make an' ter spend. Never see sech a extravagant gal in my born

days! Thar wasn't enough money in Dalesboro, nor enough ways ter git shet o' it! I kept her ter hum all thet summer after she graduated but in the fall she—she went."

"Do you mean she ran away?" Dennis demanded before McCarty could stop him, but the old man chuckled, nodding.

"Thet's what she done an' I was worrited most ter death, I reecollect. I hedn't no need, fer Josie was allus one thet could look out fer herself but she was only just nineteen, then. She writ me a letter, though, when she got ter New York an' said she was workin' in some doctor's office.—But how I do run on! I don't git much chance ter talk 'bout Josie, not ter folks thet knows her real well now. Be you workin' fer the same firm as her?"

"No," McCarty responded quickly. "We're traveling for a wholesale house. I don't think Miss Josie ever mentioned what line she was in. What firm is it?"

He waited breathlessly for the reply, but Silas Fremont shook his head vaguely.

"I don't reecollect thet she ever told me; hain't got no head for names any more. It's somethin' ter do with women's clothes; thet's how she gits so many pretty dresses at cost price. Josie's a manager or buyer, or somethin' big, I fergit just what."

"Funny, she'd get into that business from a doctor's office." McCarty recalled suddenly what Dorkin had said. "I thought Miss Josie told us she had studied to be a nurse. Didn't she, Denny?"

Dennis nodded confirmatively, but he did not venture to speak and the old man observed:

"She did. Josie went straight from that doctor to some trainin' school. I was s'prised, I tell ye, fer she wasn't one ter hanker much 'bout bein' 'round sick rooms, an' she wasn't thar more'n six months when she writ me an' said the work was too hard an' she was goin' ter be a companion ter a rich old lady who was poorly an' traveled a lot fer her health. In thet doctor's office she just hed ter wear nice white dresses an' receive his patients like a lady. I didn't take ter the idee o' her bein' a 'companion'; it sounded too much like a hired gal but she writ me from Springs somewheres of the wonderful times she was hevin' an' thet they was goin' acrost the ocean, ter Urrope." The thin voice faltered. "I—I didn't git no more letters."

"Not any more?" Dennis stared. "But when did she come home?"

"I never heard a word for more'n four year—thet made six sence she went away,—an'—an' it was pretty lonesome." The quick tears of age sprang to his eyes but he brushed them away shakily. "Young folks is like thet, though, an' she didn't know I'd lost the store an' hed a stroke an' the bank failed! I reckon Josie thought I was gittin' on fine an' just kept puttin' off writin'; you know how 'tis. Wal, a letter come at last from New York an' Lyddy answered it fer me, didn't ye, Lyddy?"

"You mean thet fu'st one from Josephine after she remembered you was alive?" The woman had reappeared

with pitcher, glasses, and a big dish of cake, which she placed on a table by the invalid's side. "I writ ter her, all right, an' told her the house was bein' sold over your head while she was hevin' gay times an' fritterin' away her wages!"

Lyddy's tone was tart and the old man exclaimed loyally:

"But she wasn't! The old lady hed died an' left Josie some money, an' she sent it ter me, enough ter pay off the mortgage an' my debts, an' a little ter put by. You know it, Lyddy!"

"Josephine didn't come a-nigh ye, though, did she?" The woman turned sourly in the doorway. "I writ her twice, ter the same address, General Delivery, an' she didn't visit with ye, not fer a day!"

"She couldn't because she was so busy gittin' goin' in this new business where a relation o' the old lady's offered her a position.—Lyddy's jealous," Silas Fremont added confidentially. "She takes it hard thet Josie should hire her ter do fer me but she's got ter earn her livin' somewheres an' she's kind o' a cousin. The barber comes twice a week an' fixes me all up an' we've got a new heater an' stove an' they's a man cuts the grass an' keeps things tidy. It's all Josie's doin', she's more'n made up ter me what we ever done fer her.—But mebbe—mebbe she wouldn't like me fer ter be tellin' ye all this."

"Why not?" McCarty asked heartily. "I should think any girl would like her friends to know that her folks appreciated her. Miss Josie must be awful fond of

you, sir. When was it you said she came to see you again?"

"Let's see. Thet was seven year ago she writ ter me ag'in an' began sendin' me money orders reg'lar an' 'bout two year afterwards she got her first vacation an' come ter visit with me. I swan I hardly knowed my own gal!" The hand holding his glass shook so that a few drops of the root-beer spilled over on the shawl covering his shrunken knees. "'Twasn't thet she'd changed, her looks I mean, but though she was quieter thar was somethin' behind it hard and strong, like she'd a-be'n through fire. It's bein' in business, I reckon, an' fightin' her way ter the top. But ye know her, ye know how she is?"

There was a pathetically anxious note in his tones and McCarty exclaimed:

"I should say so, sir! Miss Josie's a fine young lady and she's got a lot of friends. Why, even that doctor she worked for when she first came to the city.—What's his name, again?"

"I—fergit. My mem'ry hain't what it was." The old man sipped at his drink and then placed the glass on the table. "Help yerself ter more root-beer when ye git ready. My hand's kind o' shaky these days."

"Thank you, Mr. Fremont.—But we were talking about your daughter's friends. Did you ever hear her speak of a Mrs. Wall?"

"Mebbe. I don't know." It was plain that when the topic was switched from his daughter herself the old man became restless. "Josie's got passels o' friends but

I can't think o' their names. I never heard yours before."

"That's strange! We've known Miss Josie for some time." McCarty displayed ingenuous surprise. "I guess she don't bother to talk much about city folks when she's back home."

"Thet's it." Silas Fremont nodded again and his wrinkled face lightened. "Josie gits ter hum with her old pa an' she just don't think 'bout city doin's. I—I wonder when she'll come ag'in."

Dennis coughed and scuffed his feet uneasily and McCarty shook his head.

"She didn't say, but it'll be soon, likely. How often does she come?"

"'Bout twice a year. They keep her dretful busy an' she can't git away reg'lar." The wistful note had returned. "O' course it's better'n when she was companion ter thet old lady—I fergit her name, too—because then I never see her. Ye don't calc'late she's overworkin', do ye? Did she look real well?"

"I think she's very well, sir," McCarty replied soberly. "We promised to call on her when we get back to the city and tell her how you are but we've mislaid the address. Denny, here, was just reminding me of it as we got to Dalesboro, but you can give it to us, can't you, Mr. Fremont, or—or your cousin, maybe? You see we only met your daughter in the home of some friends and we could get it from them, but they've just left town for the rest of the summer. I wouldn't want Miss Josie to think we hadn't kept our word and if so be you've any message for her——?"

"Thet's one thing I don't fergit!" the old man interrupted. "Lyddy knows it, too, an' it's writ down on a piece o' paper stuck in the Bible so's they'll know whar ter reach her ef—when my time comes. It's care o' Miss Quinn, Seven-ten West Ninety-second Street, New York; must be kind o' a boardin' place, I calc'late. Josie's lived thar fer more'n three year."

"Where did she board before that? Do you remember?"

But Silas Fremont only shook his head. He had commenced to pluck fretfully at the fringe of the shawl, and McCarty rose.

"Well, sir, we've enjoyed having this little talk with you and we'll tell Miss Josie how well you're looking.—That's a pretty view you got from here, of the mill-stream and all." He turned slightly away for a moment and thrust his hand into the inside pocket of his coat.

"It's one o' my good days. I be'n happy ter see ye both an' I hope ye'll drop in ag'in when ye're up in these parts." He smiled and then added: "Tell Josie I send her my love, an' I hope she can git away ter come home soon."

They shook hands with the old man and walked carefully down the narrow brick path to avoid the nodding pansies on either side, but neither spoke until the gate had clicked behind them and they had passed the next cottage. Then Dennis cleared his throat huskily.

"The poor old devil! He'll get that next stroke he's waitin' for soon enough when he learns the truth and if he never does, and the money orders stop coming——!"

"There you go!" McCarty interrupted with unnecessary harshness. "Do you think I've no feelings either? The old gentleman'll never know, if we have to send him a wire that she's gone to Europe for the firm and then fake those money orders ourselves!—Look behind you for a minute and see is anybody coming."

Dennis obeyed and there fell upon his amazed ears the tinkle of breaking glass and a rending sound.

"What in the world——?" he demanded.

"Where've you got Hatherly's car?"

"In the shed back of the hotel. But what——?"

"Then start it as quick as the Lord'll let you and meet me in front of the express office, where I'm going for the bag," McCarty directed. "It's a thief I am, and I feel meaner than any guy that would rob a poor-box, Denny, but we've got to beat it out of this town before old Silas finds I stole his daughter's picture and sends Lyddy after your friend the constable that's pinched you once already!"

They separated hurriedly and McCarty retrieved the walrus bag from Dorkin.

"How'd ye find old Silas?" the latter asked curiously.

"Very nice gentleman. He says it'll be all right for us to leave this at the Admiral Hotel in New York for Mrs. Wall." McCarty leaned confidentially over the counter. "That daughter of his must be a fine woman; he talked a lot about her."

"Josie? Wal——," Dorkin set his lips grimly, "ef a gal o' mine could go traipsin' off tew the ends o' the airth while everything went tew perdition with me an'

I hed a stroke besides, seems tew me I wouldn't set sech store by her ez he does!—Not thet Josie knew nothin' 'bout it, I'll say thet fer her, an' when she did come back years afterwards she looked ez ef she hedn't be'n none too happy herself, fer all the money she was makin'. I calc'late it hain't easy fer no gal tew git on in the city at first 'thout a trade.—Look in ag'in when ye pass through Dalesboro."

McCarty heard the purr of the motor outside and taking his leave hurriedly he rejoined Dennis, seating himself beside him with a nod.

There was silence between them until they had passed the last straggling cottages of the little village and were rolling at a decorous pace along the turnpike to the south. Then Dennis asked:

"Where to, Mac?"

"The first big town where we can leave this car in a garage and telephone Doctor Allen to have Buck Hatherly send for it," McCarty responded, his eyes on the road ahead. "Then we'll make connections ourselves for New York."

"That'll be Concord, and the first connection I make will be with a new pair of pants!" Dennis announced firmly. "It's all right for you that had a chance to go back to the Griscoms' and doll yourself up like the boss of the ward on an annual picnic, but I'm still in the clothes I trailed through the marsh night before last and Molly would faint if she laid eyes on me! It's at my sister's I'll have to be staying for I'm still on sick leave and if I was to show up at the fire-house——"

"You'll keep away from it, Denny. 'Tis not home either of us are going, not to stay. We're still on the case and going strong, but what do you think of it now?"

"I'm thinking I'd give something to know where Mrs. Wall was those four years and more that she dropped out of sight." Dennis eased his long frame down more comfortably behind the wheel. "She was a slick one, if you ask me! No wonder the doctor's office was too slow for her, and the hospital training too hard. 'Rich old lady,' my eye! Maybe she nursed this Francis Wall and then married him for his money, and was ashamed to show him that her father was a plain, old country store-keeper; then after he'd died she'd likely get remorse and write home. She couldn't tell old Fremont she'd been married to a rich man and never let on, or he'd have guessed the reason why she didn't have the two of them meet and be cut to the heart of him! 'Tis seven years since she started to write home again, and Mrs. Hatherly said she'd gathered that Mrs. Wall's husband had been dead about the same length of time, if you remember."

"But Mrs. Wall didn't go home, not for two years after, and it's only for a little over three years her father has had that address of hers he gave us. Norris told us he'd been acquainted with her since three years ago last fall. That makes four years that nobody knows anything about, then two that her old father got letters and money orders—not checks, Denny, you'll mind!—and the last five that he's seen her now and then." McCarty shook his head. "'Tis not only the four years

but the three and a half which came after that we've got to account for if we want to get a complete line on her. It's something that happened in that time which led down through the years straight to last Monday night, to the finish in the shack at the Cove."

"Then we're no nearer to it than when we started," Dennis averred consolingly. "That Mrs. Quinn is a blind, of course, and it's little you'll get from her. If we could only have shook old Fremont's memory back to working order!"

"It's in what he couldn't tell us because he'd never known, that we've got a lead, anyway," McCarty cogitated aloud. "I doubt but there was a deeper reason for all the lies and deception than just that she might have been ashamed of her home folks to a rich husband, Denny. Fremont said that when she did come home she was changed, as though she'd 'been through fire' and although he didn't realize it himself he let out that the change wasn't altogether for the better; 'hard', was a word he used to describe her, you'll mind, and old Dorkin said about the same thing to me awhile back. That don't sound much like just ease and pleasure and luxury, does it?"

"It does not, but where's your lead?" Dennis switched on the lights, for the dusk was deepening. "We know who she was in the beginning and what the world took her to be at the end but how's it going to help us with the years in between?"

"We've got to try and work back to the Josie Fremont that first hit New York to make her fortune. She was

only nineteen and green, but hard-headed and out for the coin even then. Those that want money to hoard will work their fingers to the bone for it, but if it just means luxury and excitement to them and the pleasure of throwing it around they'll scheme and plan and do everything but toil for it. That was Josie Fremont, and she got what she was after without digging in the mire for it as far as the world knew, but we've got to find out each turning of the way.—Step on the gas, Denny, if you want to get to Concord before the stores close."

CHAPTER XIX

AN OLD FRIEND

"TO my mind, New York on a blistering hot Saturday in the height of summer was always as quiet as the grave, but look at it, Mac!" Dennis halted at the exit of the subway which had brought them uptown from the station, to sniff the odor of melting asphalt hungrily. "Would you think there were so many people left in the world and so much doing? I feel like a rube——"

"And you look like one, gaping there!" McCarty interrupted. "We've no time to be admiring the city. Come on!"

He turned down the side street leading to the river and Dennis followed.

"You may know what we'll be doing after this Mrs. Quinn lets us down, but I don't," the latter declared. "If Josie Fremont came to town a matter of twelve or thirteen years ago and you've no more than an unnamed doctor and the hint of a training school—which may both be lies like the rich old lady and the husband, too, for the matter of that!—where do we get off?"

"They're not all lies, Denny. I'm thinking the position with the doctor and try at nursing were both true

enough, for she'd nothing then to hide from the old man at home. 'Twas when she gave that up as too hard and slow a road that she stepped out into the one we've got to follow. We'll see what the Quinn woman has to say first before we look ahead."

Number Seven-hundred and ten was an apartment house of an older, less pretentious period than the towering, ornate structures which flaunted themselves on either side. Two draggled palms flanked the entrance, the linen covers on the hall furniture were none too clean and the dusky youth, who yawned over the switchboard, looked up with lack-luster eyes as McCarty asked for Mrs. Quinn.

"Elevator ain't wu'kin', but hit's only one flight, front, left," he replied. "Mis' Quinn say anybuddy what come lookin' fo' rooms kin go right up."

A very blonde lady, her stout, bulging form encased in a bungalow apron, opened the door of the apartment to them with a beamingly expectant smile, but it faded as McCarty inquired blandly if Miss Fremont were at home.

"She's out of town." The woman's florid color changed beneath the dusting of powder. "I couldn't say when she'll be back."

The door started to close but Dennis' broad foot was planted over the sill and McCarty's tone took on a firmer note.

"How long has she been away, ma'am?"

"About a month.—She—comes and goes." Mrs. Quinn spoke with an oddly increasing hesitation. "I

couldn't tell you where—where to reach her just now."

She pushed against the door, affecting not to notice the foot which impeded its progress, but McCarty was insistent.

"Where did you forward her letters to her last, if you are Mrs. Quinn?"

"I don't forward them, I—I keep them here for her." The woman's eyes began to snap. "You'll have to excuse me, I've got a lot to do. Who shall I say called?"

"Hadn't we better step inside to tell you that, ma'am?" The half-insolent authority of the old days was manifest in his voice as well as manner and Mrs. Quinn recognized it. One hand went to her ample bosom and she leaned back limply against the wall of the narrow hall.

"Why——! Come in if you want to; the parlor's just in front. I don't know anything about my roomers, though. As long as they behave themselves and pay regular I mind my own business."

McCarty strode ahead and entered a room, the none too thorough rearrangement of which revealed that it was used as a sleeping apartment at night. Bedclothes peeped from beneath the cover of the couch in the corner, toilet articles were scattered among the ornaments on the mantel and a kimono was flung over the back of a chair. A profusion of newspapers littered the table and floor, and Dennis bent forward to scrutinize them for a moment, then nudged his companion and nodded toward them; the collection comprised most of the important metropolitan dailies and each was opened at a more or

less prominently spaced account of the latest developments in the murder on the Cape!

"Miss Fremont doesn't room here." McCarty turned and fixed the woman with a stern eye. "She uses your home as an address, though, and that's against the rules of the postal——"

"She does! That little room at the end is hers." Mrs. Quinn began nervously to gather up the papers, crumpling them together in haste. "She's had it for over three years!"

"Did she ever occupy it, Mrs. Quinn? Did she ever spend a night under this roof?"

"Miss Fremont pays for it and—and she has her key—!" the woman faltered, then added with a show of spirit: "People can have their letters sent to wherever they've got a room, I guess, whether they live in it or not!"

"Did any one ever call on her here?"

"Only one woman, and that was about two months ago: Miss Veith, her name was. She said she was an old friend of Miss Fremont's but I could only tell her what I told you." She spoke in an injured tone. "I don't know a thing about Miss Fremont, but a nicer, quieter-mannered girl I never met. She answered my advertisement about a room and though I'm particular as a rule I could see she was a lady and I didn't bother to look up her references. If it brings any trouble to her, having her letters sent here, I'm very sorry. Goodness knows they're few enough, not more than one every month or so, and all from the same place——!"

She caught herself up, but McCarty nodded reassuringly.

"From New Hampshire—Dalesboro—we know. But are you sure that none came from anywhere else?"

"Just one, that I know of." Mrs. Quinn paused and her eyes traveled unconsciously to the disordered mantel. "It came about three weeks ago and she—she hasn't called yet for it."

"Didn't you think it was queer that she should pay for a room all this time just to have her mail sent here?"

"That was her business." The blonde head tossed. "I wondered, of course, but I had no reason to ask questions."

"It didn't occur to you that 'Fremont' mightn't be her real name, did it?" McCarty advanced a step and the papers rustled crisply as Mrs. Quinn's grasp tightened upon them.

"Why—lots of people have professional names, actresses and such. I don't know who her relations were; she never talked to me beyond just 'good afternoon.' I guess maybe some of them were rich though and—and up in society. I can't tell you anything more about her——"

"Is this Miss Fremont?" McCarty suddenly thrust the purloined photograph beneath her eyes.

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Quinn's face flushed and then paled. "That is, it might have been when she was a young girl. It looks like her, but I couldn't say for sure."

"You've seen others that look like her, too, in the past week, haven't you? Snapshots and drawings in

the newspapers? You've got some in your hands this minute!" McCarty's voice thundered. "They look enough like her to be her sister, don't they?"

"Her sister, yes, or some other relation! I never saw such a resemblance!" Mrs. Quinn gasped and plumped down into a chair. "I haven't had a minute's peace since I saw the sketches of that—that other woman who was killed up in Massachusetts, thinking that perhaps Miss Fremont might be dragged into the notoriety of it if they were connected, for there was a mystery about both of them! It wasn't any of my business, as I said, but Miss Fremont's clothes were just elegant if they were dark and plain and you could tell from her manners that she was used to a fashionable life and a fine home, not—not like mine! I've always kept a respectable place though, and quiet, and I couldn't afford to get mixed up in this on account of the letters if—if that dead woman was her aunt, maybe, or—or an older sister!"

"She looked older to you, then, the woman who was murdered?"

Mrs. Quinn nodded vehemently.

"Oh, much—years, I should say. They looked alike, there's no denying that, but Miss Fremont was—is only about twenty-eight, I guess, and this Mrs.—Mrs. Wall might be around thirty-five, from the pictures. I can't tell you any more, I don't know a thing!"

"All right, ma'am, we won't bother you any longer." McCarty glanced at Dennis. "We'll just take charge of that letter, though, which came for Miss Fremont and if any others come, hold them. We'll be back."

Mrs. Quinn rose and crossing to the mantel she rummaged for a minute, then turned and laid a square envelope on the table.

"There, and I hope I shan't get into trouble about it! I—I don't know what I can say to Miss Fremont when —when she comes again!"

"If she comes," McCarty paused significantly, "you'll do well to tell her to get her mail where she lives in the future.—Good morning, ma'am."

As they went down the stairs Dennis demanded:

"Do you think she knows, Mac? Was she lying?"

"She don't know for sure but she thought she recognized those society snapshots in the papers to say nothing of the sketches of the dead woman's face, and she's afraid. The only stall she tried to give us was about the age, I think." McCarty halted on the landing, examined the envelope Mrs. Quinn had given him, and smiled. "Take a look at this, Denny."

Dennis scrutinized it critically, and then shook his head.

"Big, sprawly, woman's handwriting, and the postmark is Grand Central," he commented. "There's not much help on the outside of it, Mac."

"Turn it over."

"It's been opened and then gummed together again!" He felt of the ruffled, slightly soiled flap. "Mrs. Quinn must have steamed it, and she didn't make a very good job of it, at that!"

"It shows she was curious, though, and anxious, maybe." McCarty unceremoniously ripped the envelope

apart. "Let's see who it is wrote to Josie Fremont here."

"'Dear Jo,'" Dennis read over his companion's shoulder. "'I don't know whether you remember me or not but I saw you going into 710 about a month ago when I was on a case across the street. I called the first chance I got but you had gone out of town. I'd love to have a good talk with you about the old days in the hospital. Won't you come and have tea with me some afternoon? I live at the Nurses' Club on West End Avenue, right near you; funny we haven't met, isn't it? I'm crazier about the work than ever, it is too bad you left to take that Yates case and didn't finish the course. I'll never forget that old woman; you must have had your hands full with her, but it was a splendid chance to travel. You looked as though everything had been going well with you and I was awfully glad. I shall look forward to seeing you soon, so do come.

"'With love, as ever,

"'HESTER VEITH.'"

McCarty slipped the letter back into the mutilated envelope and remarked:

"The Nurses' Club, eh? I'm thinking that will be our next stop, Denny. I'd like a word or two with Miss Hester."

"It's the devil's own luck you're having, Mac!" Dennis exclaimed. "The 'Yates case' must be the rich old woman Fremont told us about! Let's try to look her up, or the family she left behind her, and let the girl slide. It's plain she knows nothing about the Wall marriage and you'll get nothing from her but a lot of chatter."

"It's that I want," McCarty responded, starting down the stairs once more. "Besides, if she's never forgot the old woman, as she says, she may be able to give us a

line on her and it'll save a lot of trouble. Wait till I look in the telephone book for this Nurses' Club."

They stopped at the switchboard, ascertained from the directory that the establishment in question was only three blocks away and hurried out into the sizzling heat again.

"What gets me is that Mrs. Wall—or Josie Fremont—should have gone in for nursing, of all things!" Dennis observed as they turned toward the avenue. "Her father himself said she'd no patience with the sick and loving excitement as she did, with her looks besides, it's a wonder she didn't go on the stage."

"You've got her wrong, Denny." McCarty paused to mop his forehead. "'Twas not display and wild good times she was after but quick money and real society and she was sharp enough, maybe, to realize that she'd have a better chance to cop a rich husband if he was flat on his back and thought his next breath depended on her care of him than if he was buying the supper and felt that was the life!—If this Veith girl is out on a case we'll trail her, no matter whether it's smallpox or no!"

But Miss Veith had just come off duty and presently she appeared in the reception-room of the club; a plump, rosy, clear-eyed young woman with a self-reliant though slightly puzzled air.

"The clerk 'phoned up that you gentlemen wanted to see me on a confidential matter." She motioned towards a group of chairs near one of the open windows. "Won't you sit down? If you have come about anything

connected with my professional work, with any of my cases, I'm afraid I must decline——"

"We haven't, Miss Veith." McCarty smiled genially. "It's about an old friend of yours. Her people at home haven't heard from her in years, not since she was studying in the hospital with you, and they're trying to get trace of her, but quietly, you understand."

Miss Veith frowned.

"A girl I knew? You ought to be able to locate her through one of the nurses' registries if she is working."

"She never finished the training course. I'm speaking of Miss Josie Fremont."

"Why, she lives just a few blocks away!" Her brow cleared. "I saw her only a month or so ago, and wrote to her."

"But you never got an answer, did you?" asked McCarty significantly. "If you mean at Seven-ten, she moved a month since, leaving no address; we were too late ourselves. You knew she came from the country?"

"Yes, from New Hampshire, but she never talked very much about it." Miss Veith nodded, smiling reminiscently. "I don't think she relished the idea of being considered a village girl and you never would have taken her to be one. She was more like a woman of the world, in some ways, though she couldn't have been more than twenty then. I'm afraid I can't help you any, for that was twelve years ago and I never saw or heard of her again until I caught that glimpse of her going into the apartment house a few weeks ago and recognized her."

"You're quite sure it was the Miss Fremont you knew?"

"Oh, positive. There was something, an individuality about her that you couldn't forget. We girls often wondered what became of her, for she was a puzzle to us."

"How?" McCarty added: "I'm only asking because her family never could understand her taking up nursing; they didn't think she was suited to it."

"She wasn't," Miss Veith replied emphatically. "Her heart wasn't in it. I believe she had tried a secretarial position and then been an attendant in a doctor's office before she came to us. Jo—Miss Fremont—wasn't lazy but she hated the drudgery, and the first-term work disgusted her. She would have made a splendid surgical nurse if she had taken a real interest in the work, for she was quick, and quiet, and capable and cool—the coolest character, I think, that I ever knew."

"You mean, miss, that she had nerve?" Dennis asked suddenly.

"It was more than that; one might almost have called it a lack of sensibility. Lots of girls faint the first time in the operating theater, you know; even the junior medical students turn sick at the sight of blood, but Miss Fremont was absolutely unmoved. In my profession you can't permit your sympathy to get the best of you, it isn't just to your patient or yourself, either; but you can't pull a critical case through successfully unless you take a personal interest and help your patient to fight. Miss Fremont didn't have that quality, though she could

make anybody like her if she wanted to. There was one old lady—a diabetes case—whom none of the graduate nurses themselves could handle, but she took an immense fancy to Miss Fremont." The young woman paused, and added: "That was how she happened to leave us."

"Was the old lady's name 'Yates'?" McCarty eyed her guilelessly.

"Yes. You know of her, then?" Miss Veith's straight brows lifted. "She was a widow, enormously wealthy I believe, and just in the first stage of the disease. The doctor ordered her to a health resort—I don't remember where—and she induced Miss Fremont to give up the training and go with her as a sort of practical nurse and companion. Of course, it meant new scenes and probably a huge salary but we were all dreadfully disappointed in Jo, to think that she would throw away her profession like that. She did, though, and we never heard from her again. I broke down soon after my graduation, from overwork, and had to go out West for my health. When I came back and met some of the girls again, none of them knew what had become of her. You see, I can't help you after all, and I'm sorry. Jo never mentioned her family, that I can remember."

"Then we'll keep you no longer from your rest, since you're just off a case." McCarty got up from his chair. "It was good of you to see us, miss. You don't recall which Mrs. Yates it was took her away? The family can't remember if Miss Fremont mentioned it in the last

letter, the one saying she was leaving the hospital work for good."

"Oh, yes." Miss Veith nodded. "Her husband had been a famous man in his day; she was Mrs. Justin Yates."

CHAPTER IX

THE SHADOW OF CRIME

"I've heard of many a great man, but never of this Justin Yates," Dennis remarked a little later as he and McCarty sat over a belated lunch in a restaurant, not far from the scene of their last interview. "What did he do, Mac? Corner the market or play politics? If he made a lot of money he must have been in right."

"He didn't make it, he had it," McCarty replied. "If it's the old gentleman I've in mind the money was in the family for generations and he was an ambassador to somewhere or other, in the days when the map wouldn't be changed whilst he was out to lunch. There's a book called 'New Yorkers of Note' that we'll find in the library downtown and it ought to give a history of his life."

"And what good will that be, with him dead before ever Josie Fremont beat it for the city? The girl's story to her father was straight goods as far as we've gone and if the old lady is dead, too——?"

"There'll be relatives left who might recall her nurse-companion, and give us a line on where she went, after. We've had luck, so far," McCarty admitted, "but re-

member, Denny, we've not accounted for one of those missing years, though we're on the threshold of them now. 'Tis a wide gap to be bridged between an old invalid's attendant and the woman of fashion and money that Mrs. Wall was."

"It's hard to believe they were one and the same." Dennis pushed aside his coffee cup. "Nerve and a cool head we know Mrs. Wall had, but that bright little nurse back there is right; there was something unnatural about Josie Fremont, that she'd no spark of human feeling in her. She was that cold-blooded you'd think she could commit murder herself and not turn a hair."

McCarty sat with knitted brows for a moment and then roused himself.

"She took good care of her old father as soon as she found he needed it, Denny, though there's another way to look at it. We'll get nowhere by sitting here guessing, and the library might be closed."

Half an hour later they were poring over a ponderous tome in the reading-room of that institution, with McCarty's stubby forefinger running down column after column.

"There are enough 'Y's!'" Dennis commented. "Yale, Yardley, Yarrow——"

"Here we are! Yates—hum!" McCarty flattened the page. "'Justin Elias, son of Beauregard and Elizabeth Van Ingen, born—diplomatic service, ambassador.'—— I told you, Denny.—'Married Emma Louise Polk, of Nashville, Tennessee—Died March 8, 1900—Residence, St. Paul's Place.'"

"I never heard of it, and I've fought fires from the Battery to the Bronx," Dennis observed skeptically as McCarty slammed the book down and rose.

"'Tis an old-fashioned bit of a square away downtown that saw the best of society in its day, though that's long past." For the first time there was a dubious note in McCarty's tones. "I doubt but there'll be office buildings or warehouses there now, for 'tis years since I strayed into that precinct and it was dead-looking then. We'll be hailing a taxi, Denny; you're used to this heat in your line of work but my collar is wilting fast."

Little was said as they sped down the broad avenue to its end, then through the Square and among the tortuous, narrow streets beyond, until they came at last upon an oasis of quiet in the din of traffic, a small, triangular space of vivid green surrounded by a high iron fence, with an old church at one side and stately stone mansions on either hand. Most of them were closed and bore a deserted look, but the one before which their taxi halted was festooned with window-boxes and trailing vines, and the weak-kneed but dignified butler who admitted them might have been as aged himself as the sacred edifice across the park.

"I'm looking for the relations of the late Justin Yates," McCarty announced, unconsciously lowering his tones in the oppressive stateliness of the atmosphere. "Do any of them live here now?"

The butler coughed.

"Mrs. Yates passed away more than ten years ago, sir. Miss Genevieve Yates, her niece, resides here now."

"Will you ask her, please, if she'll be kind enough to see us for a minute? Tell her it is important business of a private nature connected with her family and a short interview will save her a great deal of annoyance."

The old man looked doubtful, but motioned tentatively towards a high-backed settle.

"I will see, sir. I am afraid Miss Yates is indisposed, but if you will wait——?"

He tottered up the stairs and Dennis muttered sepulchrally:

"Can you picture that girl in this morgue of a house? It don't ring true, somehow, Mac."

"Wait for a bit," the other advised sagely. "Miss Yates will see us, all right. I know this kind, and the word 'family' will open the door quicker than the name of the Almighty!"

Nor was he mistaken, for the butler returned to usher them into a drawing-room, tomb-like in its shrouding linens and dim, lofty-ceilinged space, and after an interval Miss Yates appeared.

She was a tall, slender, white-haired woman with a thin, high nose and piercing eyes that scrutinized them in coldly impersonal curiosity, as though they were specimens of some almost extinct species in which she held no interest.

"I am Miss Yates," she announced. "The message you sent by my butler was a most extraordinary one, but be seated, please."

Dennis perched himself gingerly on the edge of a

chair and twiddled his hat between his knees, but McCarty bowed and remained standing.

"'Tis extraordinary business we've come on, ma'am, and I'll have to ask you some questions that'll maybe sound impertinent but if you'll answer me you'll not be troubled again. It's about your aunt, Mrs. Justin Yates."

"'My aunt!'" the elderly woman exclaimed in surprise mingled with hauteur. "Mrs. Yates has been dead for some years."

"Did she reside here, ma'am, during the last years of her life?"

"No. Never after the death of her husband. She traveled extensively—but I fail to see——?"

"But not alone, ma'am? You were with her, perhaps?"

"I saw very little of my uncle's widow." The added stiffness in her manner told volumes. "We were not congenial. She traveled constantly from one vulgar, frivolous resort to another and was accompanied by several servants and attendants; a maid, chauffeur, footman, courier, companion and, in later years, a nurse."

Her deep measured tones had lowered with the last words and McCarty said quickly:

"It is of that nurse I want to speak, ma'am."

"'That' nurse?" Miss Yates raised her eyebrows but he noticed that one delicate, blue-veined hand twitched against the fold of her gown. "Mrs. Yates had a number of them in succession. She was rather—difficult, I imagine. If it is because of some nurse that you are here I am afraid I can give you no information."

"That would be very unfortunate, ma'am." McCarty spoke with the deepest respect but there was a hint of unmistakable meaning in his tone. "The particular nurse I have reference to is one that she took out of a hospital and made a companion of; a Miss Josephine Fremont."

"I know nothing of her." The elderly figure was drawn up to its full height and the thin lips compressed. "I cannot recall that I ever heard the name."

McCarty shook his head regretfully.

"That's a great pity," he remarked. "It'll be too bad to have reporters ringing your bell and maybe the family name in the papers in a way that'll distress you when there's no need. If you can't recall the young woman maybe your aunt's doctor would know. Who was he?"

"I haven't the least idea. I did not see Mrs. Yates for months at a time and she was constantly changing physicians. I am sorry, but I shall have to ask you to excuse me——?" She turned slightly, stepping aside from the door, but her voice was shaken and McCarty held his ground.

"There must be at least one of them whose name you'd remember, ma'am, if you'd trouble to think. We only want to find out when Miss Fremont left your aunt's employ and what became of her, not wishing to drag anybody else into it."

Miss Yates shook her head and reached for the bell.

"I am sorry," she repeated. "I cannot help you."

McCarty bowed again.

"Good afternoon, ma'am.—Come, Dennis. We'll stop at the newspaper office on our way to headquarters——!"

"Oh, stop!" Miss Yates' hand fell to her side and she dropped into a chair. "I—I cannot endure having that hideous affair dragged into light again! My aunt was impulsive, a prey to every whim which entered her mind and none of us—my cousins nor myself—approved of that nurse! We considered her a conniving creature but Mrs. Yates was devoted to her and wouldn't listen. As for the doctor——!"

She paused and a shudder passed over her delicate, high-bred face. McCarty waited and Dennis sat spellbound.

"We never trusted him. There was something sinister beneath the suavity of his manner and he catered too obviously to my aunt's perverse, erratic moods, but we were helpless." She went on after a moment, each word coming with a reluctance which was almost pain. "She was fully competent and fortunately never confided in the doctor as—as another foolish, aging person did, but maintained a strictly professional relationship with him. It was the girl's influence over her that we feared and when Miss Fremont left her after a year to marry the doctor and Mrs. Yates indignantly refused to see either of them again, we were immeasurably relieved. She died a few months later."

Dennis' chair creaked and McCarty asked:

"What was the doctor's name?"

"He was——" Miss Yates paused and when she continued her voice was scarcely above a whisper. "He was Dr. Felix Walsinger."

In the utter stillness that followed, the slow, distant

ticking of a great clock somewhere in the house fell upon their ears with maddening reiteration. Dennis' face was a study as he stared at their hostess and McCarty himself found it difficult to control his rising excitement and steady his voice.

"You don't mean the Dr. Walsinger who was convicted of manslaughter in connection with the death of some rich old gentleman he was treating, and died afterward himself in prison?"

Miss Yates inclined her head.

"It was a frightful affair and the names of all his patients were of course mentioned. My aunt had just passed away when the first news of the crime burst upon the public and we congratulated ourselves that she had dispensed with his services a year before. But we lived in constant terror of notoriety during the two years that followed while one trial after another dragged out until he was finally convicted."

"It was poison he was charged with using, wasn't it?"

Miss Yates shuddered again.

"I believe so. The details were shocking, revolting! I avoided them. I have not even thought of the affair for years. When I read of his death I fancied that it was a closed chapter and I cannot imagine why it should be reopened, why you have come to me to-day!"

"It's about his wife, ma'am. I don't remember that she figured in the case at all."

"She did not," Miss Yates responded. "I do not think that she appeared and I have never heard of her since. Has—you don't mean that she has become implicated

in some other terrible affair? You spoke of Headquarters—that is the Police Department, is it not? Why have you come now, when we were not molested in connection with her husband's crime?"

"We're from the Bureau of Missing Persons, ma'am, that is all," McCarty reassured her. "Some of Miss Fremont's relatives—they didn't even know she was married, you see,—have been trying to locate her."

"Well, I sincerely hope that they will let the matter drop!" Miss Yates straightened in her chair and relief brought a note of dignified resentment to her tones. "The woman herself evidently prefers to remain in obscurity and I consider it unwarrantably officious for your bureau to send you here! I know nothing of her and I had quite forgotten her existence. If her relatives have an atom of decency they will refrain from further efforts that will only bring disgrace upon them!"

She rose and McCarty motioned to Dennis.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you, ma'am, but all her relatives ever knew of her after she left the hospital to go with your aunt was a letter about two years later that she was in some terrible trouble and they were not to try to reach her because of notoriety." McCarty improvised plausibly. "That's why I spoke of reporters being after you, maybe, in case her relatives made a big matter of it, but they'll drop it fast enough now I don't doubt, as you say. Good afternoon to you, ma'am, and thank you kindly."

"Phew!" Dennis breathed when the huge, old door had closed behind them. "I thought I should burst, in there!

I remember a bit about that Walsinger case, but not much. To think——!"

"We'll know more in a little while," McCarty interrupted grimly. "Drive to the Pennsylvania Station."

He added the last to the chauffeur of their waiting taxi and as they settled themselves, Dennis asked:

"Are we going traveling again?"

"Just a little way out on Long Island, to the home of Emery Kane. I'll 'phone from the station to see if he's sure out there but there's no doubt he'll be working over his papers for the Nicolls trial; there's a move in the case coming up Monday."

"I read of it in the paper on the train!" Dennis exclaimed. "Do you mean the great criminal lawyer?"

McCarty nodded.

"Biggest and slickest this town ever knew! He was the chief counsel for this Walsinger and 'twas only the cleverness of him made two juries disagree and saved the doctor from the chair! I remember, because I thought it was funny a man like him would take the case; Walsinger had a fashionable practice but he was no millionaire and Kane never touches anything unless there's a fortune in it."

"'No millionaire,'" repeated Dennis reflectively. "Then where'd the money come from for his defense, to say nothing of all his wife has thrown around since? We know who Mrs. 'Wall' was now and 'tis no wonder she kept it from her old father and the world, too, but we're no nearer to finding out who killed her! Her husband might have if he'd got out, for deserting him when

the trouble came and leaving him to face it alone, but he's dead and gone, you said?"

"A matter of five years ago. You'll mind, Denny, that it's five years, too, since his wife started to pay visits to her father again; she did not go while the doctor was alive." McCarty chuckled. "That was one time I fired a shot in the dark that hit more than I thought was there!"

"You mean when you told Miss Yates that there'd be reporters at the door and the family name in the papers?"

"Yes. I wanted to find out whether she connected the woman killed at the Cove, if she'd read of it, with Josie Fremont, the way Mrs. Quinn did, but she thought I meant the older affair. I had some quick thinking to do to explain it by saying the girl had written home that she was in trouble, when Miss Yates saw we knew nothing about the Walsinger affair." McCarty's face sobered. "'Twas the shadow of a crime that lay on the Fremont woman's face when she did go home, and we've still some of those missing years to account for."

It was dusk when a station taxi whirled them up to the great, white-pillared veranda of Emery Kane's country house, facing the water, and they were shown at once into a huge library which contained more books than Dennis had ever beheld in a single collection. The room's only occupant was a distinguished-looking, gray-haired man of fifty with a mobile face. A diplomatic half-smile wreathed his smooth-shaven lips as he rose and stood beside the writing-table.

"Your name is not wholly unfamiliar to me in the

annals of the courts, Mr. 'Doe.'" His shrewd eyes twinkled. "When you telephoned from the station in New York you mentioned a desire for information about an old case of mine which had been closed and practically forgotten. Of course I cannot divulge any professional secrets——"

"That's understood, sir," McCarty interrupted. "You fought the D A. to a finish and saved the man from the chair but he's dead now, anyway, and there were a few little points in connection with the case that never were brought out at any of the three trials; otherwise Headquarters would not have sent us out here now for a little help from you."

"Three trials—and my former client is dead?" Kane's voice was suave and resonant with the tones of a trained orator. "But if the case has been definitely closed, why come to me?"

"Because the points which didn't come out then, sir, may bear directly on another little matter we are investigating." McCarty seated himself in the chair to which the other had waved him while Dennis took another near the door. "I'm speaking of your defense of Dr. Felix Walsinger."

"Ah!" Kane resumed his seat and leaning back placed the tips of his fingers together. "I put some of the most strenuous effort of my career into that case and now that my client is dead, as you say, I don't mind telling you there were several points about the affair which I should like to have cleared up myself. It was unique in some respects."

"I've not had time yet to brush up on it by looking over the reports but I remember no mention of the doctor's wife," McCarty observed. "Was it she or Dr. Walsinger himself, Mr. Kane, who retained you?"

"The doctor. He sent for me when he was first placed under arrest." Kane paused. "I never met Mrs. Walsinger. As far as I know she did not communicate with her husband throughout the three trials until he was finally convicted and sentenced to twenty years for manslaughter, and I could never persuade him to talk of her."

"They'd separated before that, do you think?" asked McCarty.

"The woman had simply vanished off the face of the earth!" Kane shrugged. "My client spoke with no trace of bitterness; he merely reiterated when I pressed him that he did not know where she was and would not tell me if he did. They had been married only a year, Mrs. Walsinger was young and I understood very attractive; naturally she would have been a big card to play. The state had a strong case against us but it was built upon purely circumstantial evidence and no jury would have brought in a first degree verdict; nevertheless I could have used her with telling effect."

"The doctor sent for you, Mr. Kane. May I ask if the retainer was satisfactory?" McCarty weighed his words carefully. "I mean, if it was the usual fee you received in such cases?"

The attorney threw back his head and laughed.

"I could give you the ordinary bunk about being interested in the case and persuaded of the doctor's inno-

cence, but I won't. The retainer was highly satisfactory and no possible expense was spared throughout the case. That was one of the unique features to which I alluded."

"You mean that some one else paid the expenses of the defense?" McCarty demanded bluntly.

Kane lifted his hands and let them fall lightly upon the table.

"From first to last, every check I received was my client's personal one, drawn against his account in the Stuyvesant Bank. That account, I ascertained, was replenished from time to time by cash—actual gold and banknotes—brought by messenger. Dr. Walsinger had no real nor personal property save of negligible value and while his practice ran, I should say, from fifteen to twenty thousand a year, he appeared to have lived up to every penny of it. You must draw your own conclusions."

McCarty nodded grimly.

"He'd not have earned enough in his natural life to pay for one trial!—Wasn't he supposed to have got the old man to make a will leaving him most of his money and then poisoned him?"

"The State attempted to prove that, but by the will of Mr. Bartholomew Talmadge, Dr. Walsinger would have been a beneficiary to the extent of only fifty thousand dollars; not one-tenth the cost of his defense." The attorney smiled. "Certainly not an inducement to a man whose practice netted almost half that a year, and I had any number of reliable witnesses, as you can see by running over the records, to prove that the doctor was

fully cognizant of this fact; that was one of my strongest points."

"Who did inherit the bulk of Mr. Talmadge's estate?"

"It was left to two nephews and a niece, his only living relatives, I believe. I cannot recall the exact terms of the will but I think they shared equally, or nearly so. None of them had seen the old gentleman for years and they did not appear at any of the trials.—But the records will give you all that."

"And we are keeping you, sir," McCarty said apologetically. "There is just one more question or two. After Dr. Walsinger's conviction did you try to do anything more for him?"

"I made every move, used every expedient possible, and my client never gave up hope until the last." He broke off abruptly. "That was another unique phase of the affair. Dr. Walsinger fought gamely and intelligently and never lost his nerve, but I thought the conviction would crush him, naturally. It did nothing of the kind! He was not at all crestfallen and although the sentence staggered him momentarily he reacted almost at once. He proved to be a model prisoner, as I learned later, and his continued cheerfulness under the circumstances was a puzzle to the guards and his fellow prisoners. I never attempted to delude him with false hopes of an early pardon or commutation and I confess I never myself understood his attitude. Perhaps——?"

He paused and McCarty urged:

"Yes, Mr. Kane?"

"Perhaps, if I had been in time when the end came

I might have learned something of great interest. Dr. Walsinger had served three years of his sentence when he was attacked by an insane fellow convict and mortally wounded. He sent for me and I went to him at once, but it was too late; he was beyond speech." The attorney moved some papers idly upon his table for a moment and then went on: "I have never seen a man struggle so desperately for speech, for a means of communication! He died with some vital message trembling on his lips!"

CHAPTER XXI

BUCK HATHERLY BREAKS SILENCE

IT was noon on Monday when an asthmatic car of ancient vintage bore McCarty and Dennis once more over the highroad from Plimptonport to the Cove. Their trip from New York had been a comparatively silent one, for McCarty was lost in his own thoughts and Dennis was in a numbed state bordering on stupefaction from the recent developments in the case.

He aroused himself for a moment when they passed the Norris place and craned his neck to peer over the fence toward the house, but the shutters were closed, no one was in sight and even the dogs were still.

The single street of the village itself, when they turned into it from the common, bore the same aspect of semi-desertion and brooding somnolence which had characterized it when they emerged from their ignominious night in jail, almost a week before. A few old men still lounged about in the scanty shade and the same dogs sprawled in listless attitudes, panting and snapping at flies; yet, as on the previous occasion, with their appearance the shutters on the cottage windows clicked as they turned, and here and there a woman came out to porch or door-yard. Interest in the murder had not flagged; it was

merely held in abeyance while the ordinary routine of life went on.

Mrs. Griscom met them at the door with a beaming smile of welcome.

"I declare!" she exclaimed. "We calc'lated you folks wasn't comin' back to go fishin' after all! Doctor Allen's be'n like a hen on a hot griddle, over here five times a day to find out ef you'd come back, an' Eb Bartlett, too!"

"I guess we'll go right over and see the doctor," McCarty remarked. "Can we leave our bags here in the entry?"

"'Course you can, but the doctor won't be home till night." Her soft eyes clouded. "Jed Wiggins' boy's dyin' over to Mattagansett. Hev you seen the newspapers? 'Masa Hite's be'n talkin' mighty big to the city reporters 'bout what he's goin' to do but he hasn't done nothin'. Seems 'sef mebbe we'll never know who killed thet poor critter!"

"Run over, Denny, and leave this at the doctor's office, anyway." McCarty handed to his companion the walrus bag, freshly encased in brown paper. "I'm going down to the shore for a while.—Terrible hot, isn't it, ma'am?"

Mrs. Griscom nodded as she turned to go back to her kitchen. "Looks as ef we'd have another blow by nightfall; the sky 'pears thataway. I—I hope the boats come in airly."

They paused at the gate and Dennis asked:

"What are you going down to the shore for? There's nothing we can do till the doctor gets back."

"There's something you can do as soon as you've left

that bag safe!" McCarty responded, his eyes on a gaunt figure advancing excitedly towards them at a shambling trot down the street. "Get hold of that constable and keep him off me! I want to look over the ground outside that shack again, and besides you can get a line on what he knows about the other people beside the Hatherlys who have summer homes around here. Don't be crowing too loud to him either, Denny; remember we've got everything about this murder except the guy that pulled it off and we're no nearer him than when we started!"

Reluctantly Dennis left him and McCarty proceeded to the shore. Nets were drying in the sun but no one was in sight, and he turned towards the shack huddled in forlorn isolation on the Point. But as he passed the sere, broken hedge which marked the lower boundary of the artist's garden, a voice hailed him:

"Good day to you, Mr. Thompson." He took off his hat and flapped futilely with it at a sand fly. "'Tis a cruel hot day, and no mistake!"

"I thought you had changed your mind about staying on for a little fishing after the inquest, for I have not seen you about." Thompson, in a painter's smock and with the inevitable meerschaum pipe in one hand, came down the path towards him, followed by the great setter. "Won't you come in?"

"Thanks, sir, 'twould be a bit cooler in the shade, I'm thinking." McCarty mounted the terrace steps which led up from the strip of beach. "My friend and I did go back to town but it was worse there than here, and we thought we'd run out again for a day or two on the

water and to see what the sheriff is doing about the murder. The papers are full of it on account of the poor lady being known in society."

Thompson shook his head gravely.

"I am afraid it will never be solved. The local authorities mean well but they are totally incompetent to handle the affair and none of Mrs. Wall's relatives appears sufficiently interested to come forward and institute a more expert investigation. It will go down as one of the grim tragedies which suddenly rear themselves in the peaceful countryside, like noxious weeds in a garden. —Speaking of weeds, I am sorry I cannot offer you a cigar."

"I've one myself, sir." McCarty drew one from his pocket. "I didn't see you at the inquest."

"No. As I was not needed, I kept away." Thompson waved towards the house. "There is a faint breeze up on the porch, suppose we sit there? I am distressed that my friend, young Hatherly should be under such a cloud."

McCarty glanced up and the match he had been about to light dropped from his fingers. Groping for it among the shiny long leaves of the plant which bordered the path, he repeated:

"Young Hatherly? Oh, the sheriff can get nothing on him just because he was driving around the country in the storm whilst the murder took place."

"But the attitude of the neighborhood is veering." Thompson puffed at his pipe for a moment and then went on: "Of course it is unthinkable that he knew any-

thing about the crime, but the village folk are looking at him askance and even some of the summer residents are commenting on his inability or unwillingness to account more plausibly for his whereabouts that evening. He's a light-hearted, devil-may-care sort of a chap and if he went out and drove aimlessly for hours through the storm it must have been because of some unusual disturbance of mind. Mr. Lowden tells me—but I am gossiping like an old housewife!"

"Not at all, sir." McCarty leaned back in the grateful shade of the porch. "It seems to me Mrs. Hatherly spoke of somebody named Lowden. Haven't they got a bungalow further up the shore?"

Thompson nodded.

"I believe they were to have dined with the Hatherlys on the same evening I was invited to meet this Mrs. Wall, but Mrs. Lowden was indisposed, so they declined also. I am glad now that I followed my own lazy, unsociable impulse and remained at home, for had I made the acquaintance of the unfortunate woman the shock of her subsequent horrible death would have been even more revolting!" He shuddered and then laughed half apologetically. "I am not a hermit but the longer I have lived alone in solid comfort with my painting and books and garden, and Lisa, the less I have felt inclined to cultivate my neighbors."

The setter, crouched at his feet, had raised her head at the mention of her name and McCarty looked down at her thoughtfully.

"Is she a good watchdog, Mr. Thompson?"

"Splendid. It is regrettable that I did not leave her out of doors last Monday evening but I took her in for shelter from the storm. She would undoubtedly have heard any disturbance in the cabin or seen an unaccustomed light there and her baying would have warned me and aroused the village, perhaps preventing the tragedy." He pulled gently at the silky ears. "Lowden tried to buy her from me once—but I started to tell you what he said about young Hatherly; he did return home or at least drive towards it from the west more than an hour after he left the house. He must have started in the direction of the Canal and then turned and followed the highroad out toward the end of the Cape."

"So that he passed Hatherly House and the Common here, and Norris's place and out through Plimptonport?" McCarty asked. "How does this Mr. Lowden know?"

"He met him just the other side of Hatherly House, but driving furiously in this direction, while he himself was hurrying homeward from the storm. Lowden is a good friend of theirs and he cannot fathom the youngster's attitude of dogged defiance over what must of course be a trivial matter, quite apart from the events of that night."

"Who are these Lowdens? Have you known them long, sir?"

"They built their bungalow here before I came and I know them in the casual way that I do most of the summer visitors," Thompson replied. "I have dined with them once or twice and they had tea with me here a little over a fortnight ago; Mrs. Lowden wanted to see

a study of the dunes which I had just finished. They are Boston people and I believe her husband owns some mills out near Brockton. I'm not interested in manufacturing and I never inquired what he produced."

"Do you sell your pictures, Mr. Thompson?" McCarty's question was blunt but his host laughed pleasantly.

"When people are kind enough to take a fancy to them at the exhibitions! I keep a few which I like particularly but paint and canvas and boots and bacon—and dog biscuit, eh, Lisa?—must be paid for if one would live."

"Of course." McCarty threw his cigar end over the railing and rose. "I'd like to have a peep at the pictures some time, Mr. Thompson, though I'm no artist myself. I must be getting back to the village to meet my friend now."

"Drop in whenever you like," Thompson replied. "I'm glad to have seen you again."

Dennis did not return to the Griscoms' for dinner and the visitors from Barnstable had departed, so McCarty ate alone in the big kitchen with Mrs. Griscom and the girl, Millie. The latter greeted him constrainedly and took no part in the conversation, but he saw with satisfaction that her wild-rose color had returned and her eyes were clear and sparkling. Whatever weight had lain upon her spirit seemed to have lifted during his absence.

As soon as the meal was over he changed his collar and struck out heroically in the smoldering heat for the two-mile walk to the Hatherlys, but he found only Buck in possession.

"You returned for some fishing, after all?" the latter

greeted him. "Gad, it's hot! We'll have some iced coffee sent out to us in the summer-house; it's the only shady spot with a breath of air."

He gave the order to a strange maid who appeared in answer to his ring and as they started for the little vine-clad retreat on the edge of the terrace, McCarty remarked:

"That's a new girl your sister-in-law's got. Did Lizzie and the other one go, then?"

"Yes." Buck darted a quick glance at him. "How did you know they meant to? Servants are hard enough to keep out here but Mrs. Hatherly wasn't sorry to have them leave; they were continally prying and gossiping. She sent this one out from Boston on her way to the mountains."

"Mrs. Hatherly has gone away?"

"Yes. Bill took her up to Vermont for a change. She went all to pieces over this horrible affair." Buck paused and then added with a short laugh: "Did you come to call on her, Mr. Doe? I thought you wanted to see me!"

"To try to pump you for the coroner, sir, about why you went driving around like a crazy loon in the storm that night?" McCarty faced him candidly. "I didn't, for I've known that all along and why you wouldn't explain."

"You knew?" Buck sat down abruptly on the bench in the summer-house and stared at him. "What did you know?"

"That you were sore because a neighbor of yours was

trying to flirt with—with a certain little lady it was up to you to protect and you quarreled with her for not seeing it your way. It's to save her from gossip, nothing more, that you're sitting tight now," McCarty replied carefully. "Your good friend Lowden saw you coming this way from the direction opposite to what you said, a little before the squall, and he's telling the neighborhood."

"The damned old busybody! I don't know how you learned what you've told me, but I appreciate your keeping quiet about it. I don't want Bill to get on to what was just plain foolishness, for it's all over now and Nor——" Buck checked himself, flushing darkly, and McCarty supplemented:

"Norris knows where he gets off. Isn't that what you were going to say, sir?"

"He is selling his place down here and leaving the neighborhood for good." Buck hesitated and then broke out: "Since you know so much and have shown you can keep it under your hat, I'd like to talk something over with you. Norris is a cad and a rotter but I'd stake my life on it that he had nothing to do with the murder. Yet Mrs. Hatherly is possessed with the idea that Mrs. Wall and he knew each other before they met here and concealed the fact."

"They did." McCarty nodded. "Norris admitted it to me and it's all right; it was a kind of a confidential business acquaintanceship. So that is what Mrs. Hatherly was keeping back? I knew there was something. After Lowden saw you that night you didn't stop at

the house here, but kept right along the highroad, didn't you?"

"Yes. I was wild and wanted to knock Norris's block off but Bill would have heard of it. I even forgot an engagement I had——"

He halted once more and a light broke over McCarty.

"With Miss Millie? You were to have met her on the highroad and taken her for a bit of a spin after dinner, maybe——?"

"Who the deuce are you?" Buck stared. "You seem to have everybody's number! It's all right now and I don't care who knows it. Millie and I are engaged and we're going to announce it as soon as my brother and his wife return."

"I hope you'll let me congratulate you, Mr. Hatherly!" McCarty exclaimed heartily. "She's a fine young lady and a true one, Miss Millie is! Did you know that she went to meet you on the highroad that night and saw something that made her run home as though all the fiends were after her? I'm thinking I know what it was but wild horses can't drag it from her!"

"She saw me with Norris and heard me order him to stop his attentions to—to the lady you spoke of." Buck nodded. "No names were mentioned and Millie thought I meant Mrs. Wall, for only a few minutes before I drove along like blazes in the car—it was about half-past seven, just after Lowden must have seen me further up the road—Mrs. Wall and Norris had met there near the Common while Millie waited for me. She didn't hear what they said and they didn't see her; they were talk-

ing confidentially together and laughing, and then Mrs. Wall hurried on and left him. Millie didn't observe which way Mrs. Wall went, for just then I came along, furious, stopped the car, had it out with Norris about another woman and drove on, forgetting all about my date there with her. Of course she drew her own conclusions and we had a quarrel because I couldn't explain, but I think she understands and bless her! she trusts me, anyway!"

McCarty pulled idly at the leaves of a luxuriant, low-growing plant which thrust themselves through the interstices of the rustic railing.

"So that's why she thought you'd be suspected yourself, sir, of knowing something about the murder? She thought you must have taken a fancy to your sister's society friend and were forgetting her?"

"Yes, but I soon convinced her of the truth." Buck's homely, clean-cut face lighted with a smile and then grew quickly grave once more. "She never suspected me of the murder, of course, but she thought I might have met Mrs. Wall alone still later on the road and been seen, and then on Wednesday afternoon as you and your friend were leaving her aunt's house she heard him say to you: 'If he pretended to Mr. and Mrs. Hatherly that he'd never met Mrs. Wall before she came here to visit and she kept up the bluff too, we've only to find out what there was between them and where he was the night of the murder.' She thought you meant me and that it was I who had known my sister's guest elsewhere, you see, but her one thought was to protect me! I tell you,

Mr. Doe, I'm a lucky man!—So Norris did know Mrs. Wall, in spite of his denial to me!"

"When was this?" McCarty asked.

"On Wednesday morning. After the murder and then your visit here with the coroner to question my sister-in-law, to say nothing of the sheriff's hectoring, she was almost beside herself and came to me with her conviction that Norris had known the murdered woman before and might suspect who had killed her. I sent for Norris and when he came I took him into my den and asked him point-blank what he knew about our late guest. He declared he had never seen nor heard of her till we presented him to her, and I couldn't call him a liar, with no proof. I don't like the fellow, naturally; he's a bounder of the worst type, but whatever the nature of the understanding between himself and Mrs. Wall, and whatever he may know about her, he had no more to do with her death than I!" Buck Hatherly brought his fist down upon the railing. "It's my opinion that she came down here to avoid some one, but when they followed and demanded an interview she went out gamely enough to face them and go down in that hideous final defeat in the shack on the dunes!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE HAND OF DESTINY

THE brassy sky was deepening to purple and an ugly, droning sound was in the air as Doctor Allen drove his dust-covered, little runabout at a snail's pace down the village street. His ancient enemy had defeated him in the little cottage back at Mattagansett, and the thought of the bereavement he had left there dulled the twinkle in his small, kindly eyes and made his fat face sag wearily. But his aspect changed when he recognized the three figures awaiting him upon his porch.

"Hello, there!" he called excitedly, extricating himself from behind the wheel. "I'm mighty glad you've come back! What luck?"

"Good as far as it goes, sir, but we're not at the end yet," McCarty replied.

"They done a heap, by Glory!" Constable Bartlett executed a rheumatic shuffle upon the steps. "Found out all about the woman an' talked to her pa! Her husband was a criminal, Doc, a murd'rer, too, an' her name wasn't 'Wall' no more'n mine be!"

"Come in, all of you!" The doctor threw open the

door and waddled ahead down the hall. "Wait'll I light this danged lamp! I held in all the questions I wanted to ask last week till I pretty nigh burst and now I want to hear!"

Dennis had had a fatiguing afternoon in the constable's company and his nerves were on edge. As they trailed the other two down the hall, he whispered to McCarty:

"If that old blatherskite keeps butting in we'll never get the half of what we do know told to the coroner this night! I've got from Bartlett the family history of everybody that ever set foot in the Cove and not one of them could have been back of Walsinger through his trial; they've not money enough! We'll have to be off in the morning again."

"Maybe." McCarty scratched one hand reflectively with the other as he spoke. "I've an itch that's been driving me to distraction since supper and before, Denny, and if that's any sign, we may be nearer the truth than we think."

"Now, then!" Doctor Allen fixed his beady eyes expectantly on Dennis as they seated themselves. "What were you arrested for in Dalesboro and how did you know that was where those labels came from on the woman's bag?"

"I didn't, no more than a babe unborn!" Dennis replied truthfully. "I got pinched chasing another man and luck landed me there, but Mac would have found it anyway. In all the cases——!"

"Denny!" McCarty exclaimed. Was his incognito to

be thrown away at the last by that loyal blockhead? He scratched his tingling hand again and then turned to the coroner. "'Twas just a case of follow-your-nose, Doctor, after I found the old guy who pasted those labels on the bag. There are gaps here and there and one big question we've got to answer before we can hope to lay our hands on the man that committed this last murder, but I'll tell you what we do know."

The little doctor sat forward with his hands on his fat, wide-spread knees and his cheeks puffing out with each breath while McCarty told his story and when it was finished, he exclaimed:

"Sodom and Gomorrah! Mebbe Dr. Walsinger didn't kill the rich old man, after all! She was a nurse, she'd know about poisons——! It was arsenic you said, wasn't it?"

"White arsenic, the papers had it," McCarty replied. "After we left the attorney's house on Long Island Denny and I spent Saturday night going over the newspaper accounts of the case from start to finish. Bartholomew Talmadge had quarreled with his nephew and niece, who were the children of his sister, and with another nephew, his brother's son. They were his only living relatives so he left the bulk of his fortune equally to them in his will, but he was all alone in a great house filled with servants in New York when Walsinger, who had been attending him for a good while for old-age ailments, began switching the treatment. Mrs. Walsinger could have had nothing to do with it herself, although she may have put her husband up to it, but if she did, it was be-

cause somebody else was standing behind her, urging her on! Where did the money come from that paid for Walsinger's defense? Not from her, for she was a nurse-companion to old Mrs. Yates when he married her, and her own father was on the verge right then of going to the poorhouse."

"Why did she treat him so, do you suppose?" the doctor asked.

"She had little heart in her, by all accounts, and I'm thinking that when she got traveling around to those health resorts she forgot all about him. Then when this handsome young doctor—he was good-looking, all right, from his pictures in the papers, and not much over thirty—when he with his fine practice asked her to marry him I guess she was ashamed of Dalesboro and everybody in it." McCarty shrugged. "After his arrest she'd not face those at home till she knew what was going to happen, and maybe we'll never know where she spent the next five years; the two while his trials were going on and the first that he spent in prison before she wrote home, and the next two before he died himself and she felt free again. But all that time she was living on money that came from somewhere!"

"That was why when she did come home she told her pa she was working where she could get dresses at cost price, likely; so's she could account for even the plain things which was all she'd be apt to take with her," Doctor Allen ventured. "Why was her husband so hopeful all through his trials if he wasn't innocent?"

"He had the best counsel money could hire and he

knew if the worst came to the worst he could turn State's evidence." McCarty clenched his reddened hand. "Do you know how I figure it, Doctor? He'd never get the chair and he'd been promised that if he did go up for manslaughter he'd be got out quick. That's why he didn't take his conviction like a deathblow and why he kept hoping through the three years that followed, up to the very hour when the crazy convict bashed him and he knew he was out for the count. Then maybe his eyes were opened and he saw he'd been used as a tool all the way through and it had been meant to leave him there, or else he just turned yellow and made up his mind that whoever was in it with him should suffer too, since there was no longer a chance for himself. It was then he sent for his lawyer and tried hard to peach, but death closed the lips of him. He never took a chance on killing old Talmadge for fifty thousand bucks! He was playing for millions, and it was worth the risk of being caught and even a year or two in prison with sure freedom and wealth at the end. Somebody else wanted Bartholomew Talmadge out of the way bad enough to pay that high for it, and they found the doctor ready and willing for the job."

"Do you calc'late that sharp lawyer knows who 'twas?"

"If he does, there's no way of making him speak.—But we'll get back to Mrs. 'Wall,' as she called herself later. She was a money getter and a money spender all the way through. As a girl she wanted every luxury in the world, which was natural, but she made it her purpose in life to get them and nothing, not even crime,

would have stood in her path. Whilst we were in New York, Denny, here, said to me she was that cold-blooded you'd think she could commit murder herself and not turn a hair, and he was not far from the truth. She didn't let any village love affair side-track her and it was to make a rich marriage she went to New York." McCarty paused to scratch his hand once more and continued: "She found it wasn't so easy, though, as many another has done before her. Prospective husbands didn't come flocking to that doctor's office, nor yet to wherever it was that she worked as secretary before that, so she tried the hospital; all respectable jobs enough. There were no matrimony germs there and work was not to her liking, so she made up to the old Yates woman when she found out how rich she was and that there would be a chance to travel and go to gay health resorts.

" 'Tis in my mind that she meant to pose around in a pretty uniform, a poor but beautiful young martyr to the old lady's whims, but she found more reality to it than posing and there were too many society girls in the running with swell clothes and the time to ride and dance and flirt. When the doctor came along with the fine house and good income she was glad enough to take him, though she never cared for him, you can be sure of that, or she'd never have left him flat in his trouble. 'Twas not in her make-up to care for anybody. Whether she put him up to poisoning old Talmadge because of the money that was offered, or not, I don't know, but she knew who was financing his trials, all right, and the same party was financing her, too. I wouldn't be sur-

prised if she was glad when he was sent up, for even if he'd been acquitted she'd no mind to start life again with him and the fortune promised him, so long as she could go it alone and still keep her hold over the one who was paying."

"Blackmail!" The coroner's face was a study and Eb Bartlett exclaimed:

"Thet's what 'twas, by crickey, an' when we find the feller thet wanted the old gentleman put out o' the way, we'll find who killed her to shet her mouth about it!"

"We'll have to find out why he was in the way first," McCarty remarked. "That's the big question I spoke of, the one we'd have to be answering before we can point to the party who planned the first murder and committed the second with his own hands. Old Talmadge had made his millions in Wall Street and he'd made many an enemy along with them, men that had lost everything through him and the families of one or two who'd blown out their brains because of it; but those that still lived would not have come back strong enough to bribe the doctor nor nursed the injury that long, for 'twas many years since Bartholomew Talmadge had retired and been forgot.

"We've the heirs left, then, the niece and the two nephews. One nephew—the brother of the niece—is dead; that's proved. Denny and I—well, knowing you'd want all the dope we could get for you, Doctor, we went to a friend yesterday who pulled some wires for us, if it was Sunday, and got us a peep at the death records and the wills probated. Talmadge's nephew, John March-

mont, died four years ago in New York leaving all his money to his sister, a widow named Vernon. She lived in London, came over here to settle the estate and is supposed to have gone back again, but we've had no chance to trace her yet, nor the other nephew, Paul Talmadge, who disappeared right after he'd got his share of his uncle's money; he may be in China, for all we know!"

"'Disappeared!'" Doctor Allen repeated.

"Turned all his money into small lots of securities, the kind that could be got rid of for cash anywhere, all over the world, and just dropped out of sight. His cousin, Mrs. Vernon, sold out everything here and bought British securities which we've not been able to trace yet —through our friends who have influence, of course," McCarty amended hastily. "Bartholomew Talmadge was supposed to have left about five millions but when the estate was settled it was found to have shrunk to less than four; a good lot, even for those times, but after the smaller bequests were taken out, the nephews and the niece got just a little over a million a-piece. Now, if Walsinger's defense was paid out of it by any one of the three, and Mrs. Walsinger kept going since, with her gambling and all, there'll be precious little left. We were told, Denny and me, that she'd lost a small fortune lately."

"Couldn't the woman find 'nough ways to throw money 'round, 'thout gamblin' it?" the constable demanded.

"I'm thinking she turned to that for the excitement;

to forget," responded McCarty. "'Tis speaking ill of the dead, maybe, but although she had shown she'd no heart and no conscience, her memory was still working, and the thoughts of an old man dying helpless in slow agony and another, young and strong, behind prison bars for long years and then struck down by a crazy convict could not have been easy to live with."

"Look here!" Dennis had evidently been following a train of thought of his own. "There's one guy we've forgot all about! That 'kiss your hands' fellow, 'Claude,' who wrote Mrs. Wall the two notes in the bag, inviting her to the theater. Maybe he was hired by either this nephew or niece to get in with her and kill her!"

"'Twas not the theater, Denny; you'll mind he said 'play.'" McCarty turned to him for a moment. "When I spotted a certain friend of ours the other night for what he was, I remembered he used to have a side-kick named Claude Rapideaux, a Frenchman. He's probably split from the—the syndicate, and running little semi-private games of his own in town. I've raid—I've acquaintances who know old Swifty Claude, and he hasn't the nerve to stand off a shake-down!—If Mrs. Wall—or Walsinger—lost a lot lately she'd have been needing more, and when it wasn't handed out free she put the screws on. That's the way I size up the situation. It came to a finish somehow there in the shack on the Point."

The droning sound in the air without had increased, but none of the four in the doctor's little cottage were conscious of it in the brief pause which followed. Eb

Bartlett sat tugging at his beard as though trying to drag out a reluctant idea, and finally he spoke:

"Mebbe thar was more'n one in it; the murder I mean. When we first got a-talkin' it over, thar in the jail, didn't ye opine thet somethin' else hed happened in or around the cabin after the murd'rer left an' 'bout an hour before ye come, thet shuk it to its foundations?"

"Oh, I found out what that was as soon as I saw the shack in daylight," McCarty explained. "The guilty party wouldn't have tried to set fire to the cabin and gone out leaving that pole with the hook on it sticking through the window to let the rain in! The pole fell and crashed through the glass when it was jarred out of place by his hammering those pieces of wood across the door.—But there we are! That's all we know, Doctor, and we're sitting here, the four of us, just where we started, when the least bit of a clew we've maybe overlooked would have put us on the right track."

"Look at the hand of you, Mac!" Dennis cried suddenly. "Didn't you tell me awhile ago that 'twas itching you fierce? It's all swelled up, and red, and there's little marks on it like blisters!"

"Let me see?" Doctor Allen reached forward with professional interest, and McCarty reluctantly extended the afflicted member.

"'Tis nothing but a bit of an itch——" he began deprecatingly but the doctor interrupted.

"Ain't it? Mr. Doe, you've got a pretty bad attack there of dermatitis venenata."

"Merciful heaven!" Dennis closed his eyes as the

horror sank in and McCarty himself essayed a sickly grin he was far from feeling.

"Have I, so?" he asked. "It sounds like something too fashionable and expensive entirely for me to carry around with me, Doctor."

"When——" Dennis was making horrible faces in the effort to control himself. "How much longer has he got, sir? If I let him die out here at the back of beyond——!"

"Who said anything about dying?" The doctor laughed as he rose and waddled over to one of his cases of medical supplies. "It can spread, that's all, and burn and itch like sixty. Dermatitis venenata is just ivy poisoning. I'll wash it with hyposulphite of sodium, and then a mite of zinc ointment and a bandage will fix him finer'n a fiddle."

McCarty glanced from his swollen hand to the doctor's face and then back again saying no word, but Dennis was voluble in his relief.

"Glory be to God!—But where would he get it? Ivy grows high up on walls——"

"Not this kind." Doctor Allen's tone became a shade didactic. "It's called rhus toxicodendrun."

"Is it, now?" Dennis asked with awed respect. "And where would he be getting into this rhus—what you said,—around here? What's it look like?"

"It has three dark, shiny leaves and grows low to the ground and thick," the doctor replied, busy at his ministrations. "I never noticed any of it 'round the Cove——"

"By the twenty-four feet of the twelve apostles!"

McCarty's ringing tones broke in upon him. "Hurry, doctor, or leave it be for now, we've other work before us. Constable, got that horse pistol with you that you pointed at me in the shack that night?"

"I hev!" Eb produced the article in question and his staring eyes almost popped from his head. "What be we a-goin' to do? Ye don't mean—ye hain't got——?"

"I've got the clew that's been under our eyes this week past, but little did I know it till I put my hand on it!" McCarty gave a quick glance at the finished bandage and started for the door. "You've got it on the sheriff at last! Come on and work fast when I give you the word, for he's waiting for you, the man who killed Mrs. Wall!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A SOUL GONE FREE

IT was pitch-black outside as the four sprang down the steps of the doctor's cottage, and the wind arose in a moaning swirl about their ears.

"Why—he's a-goin' down to the shore!" Eb Bartlett exclaimed between rheumatic hops. "Thar's nothin' down thar but the empty cabin——!"

"Never you mind where he's going, Eb!" the doctor panted, holding his rotund stomach with both hands as he galloped valiantly along. "He's on the right track, you can bet!"

Dennis was just at McCarty's heels, his lean body and homely, lantern-jawed face quivering with the tense joy of the chase. No glimmering of the truth dawned on him as they reached the strip of beach at the end of the street and turned toward the lonely cabin on the Point, but he followed with the implicit, unreasoning faith which had never yet been shaken.

A blinding flash of white lightning streaked the sky high above the Sound, revealing for a fleeting instant the vast stretch of angrily tossing waters. The seething roar of the rollers sweeping up to their very feet was lost in the crash of thunder, distant but portentous, which reverberated about them.

They had passed the cluster of fishermen's huts and were plowing through the loose sand with heads bent low against the rising gale, when the deep-toned barking of a dog close at hand made McCarty halt abruptly and wheel about to the others.

"That's Mr. Thompson's dog and there's a little, low light in the house. We'll stop by for a minute, for there's something he may be able to tell us after all."

A second blaze of lightning outlined the terrace steps leading up to the path down which the setter loped inquiringly, and as the darkness closed in once more, a door back of the porch opened wide and a broad, softly luminous glow shone forth. Silhouetted sharply against the haze of light, Thompson's tall, slim figure sheathed in a toga-like dressing-gown stood erect and motionless.

"Who is there?" he called in a low, clear tone which yet carried above the moaning wind.

"Down, Lisa!" McCarty muttered. "Down!—It's us, Mr. Thompson, Mac Doe and Doctor Allen and Eb Bartlett. We want your advice; it's about the Hatherlys. I hope you'll excuse us for disturbing you with the storm coming up and all——?"

He had raised his voice as he addressed the artist and seemed to be talking on in garrulous haste, but he had increased his pace as well, and the others followed.

"Certainly. Come in.—Here, Lisa old girl, it's all right!—You did not disturb me." Thompson stood aside to let them pass and they filed into a long, low-ceilinged room. The light of a single, tall, torch-like lamp, flaring in the gust of wind, revealed massively carved settles

and chests placed at intervals against a somber-toned wall, unrelieved by any break in its dull surface save that of the high-arched, heavily shrouded windows. Rushes slithered beneath their feet as they advanced, and with the closing of the door the leaping flame of the lamp died to a flickering glow.

Dennis muttered something beneath his breath and Eb Bartlett started and gaped, but Doctor Allen's beady eyes were fixed upon their host and McCarty bowed gravely.

"I was reading, as you see." Thompson laid his pipe and a great leather-bound volume upon the refectory table that stood in the center of the room and moved to a tall cabinet in the corner, upon which the heavy carving seemed to writhe grotesquely in the smoldering light. "I shall be glad to give you any advice or assistance in my power, but meanwhile draw up chairs for yourselves and let me offer you a little refreshment, for a wild night is upon us. I sincerely hope the Hatherlys are not in any difficulty."

He turned, bearing a tall decanter and glasses, and McCarty replied significantly:

"They aren't, not yet, but you were the nearest of the people they go with and you'd likely be able to tell us a few things, sir, that even the doctor here wouldn't know."

"I will tell you anything I can." Thompson poured a clear, rich fluid like liquid amber into the five, slender glasses and replaced the decanter on the table. "I am afraid it will be no help to you, however, if you are referring to the tragedy of a week ago.—Doctor, this is ripely aged and mellow, for it has lain in the cellars here

since long before I came. You see, Constable, you need have no legal scruples about touching it, and our friends from the city will not find its like, there. Gentlemen, your health!"

He drank slowly as though each drop of the smooth, potent liquor were precious, but when he had drained his glass it slipped from his fingers and fell with a tinkling crash upon the reed-strewn floor.

"Ah!" It was more a sigh of regret than an exclamation. Then he shrugged and drew forward a tall, cathedral-backed chair. "It doesn't matter. That is good old stuff, isn't it?"

Dennis blinked as the creeping fire stole through his veins and the constable drew the back of his gnarled hand across his mouth, while the doctor nodded slowly and McCarty seated himself.

"It would be a rare drink in any day, sir, but now 'tis a gift of the gods."

"The gods bear strange gifts sometimes." A half-smile curved Thompson's lips. "But you wanted to ask me something about the Hatherlys?"

"About Mrs. Hatherly, sir." McCarty darted a swift glance of warning to the others. "When was it that she told Mrs. *Walsinger* you were a neighbor of hers here at the Cove?"

There was a moment of electrified silence. Then the doctor's chair creaked and the constable's gaunt frame jerked spasmodically, but the robed figure in the tall chair did not move.

"I do not know when Mrs. Hatherly told her." The

reply came at last in perfect self-possession and there seemed to be even a trace of amusement in his tones. "Did you think that the purpose of your visit here tonight was not clear to me from the moment I saw you on the path? I did not know when you would come but I have been ready."

"You mean——!" McCarty's gaze turned to the decanter and Doctor Allen cried out in sudden horror, but their host lifted one slim hand reassuringly.

"Only one glass was—prepared, gentlemen, and it lies broken at your feet.—Do not disturb yourself, Doctor. It is a drug beyond the range of your pharmacopœia and there is no known antidote. You will be interested, I am sure, in the symptoms as they manifest themselves and I will describe them to you. I am rather curious about them myself; it will be an unusual experience."

"My God!" The doctor's fat face was ashen. "Thompson, tell me what it is you have taken!"

"The way out, Doctor, the way to freedom. My name is not Thompson, but Talmadge."

"Then—then you're under arrest!" The constable came suddenly to life.

"Can you arrest the departure of a spirit?" Talmadge smiled once more and a slight shudder shook him. "It is coming, Doctor, a faint creeping chill like icy needles. If there is anything you wish to know we had better waste no time."

A searing, white streak of light stabbed through an opening in the draperies of one of the windows and a peal of thunder crashed down. When it had died hol-

lowly away, they heard the soft pad of feet outside and a dog's anxious whine at the door.

"Poor Lisa!" Talmadge murmured. "You will take care of her for me, Doctor? She has been a patient, devoted friend."

"You are Paul, nephew of the late Bartholomew Talmadge?" McCarty asked when the doctor had nodded solemnly.

"Yes. My two cousins had quarreled with him long before his death but I managed to keep in his good graces and I confidently expected to be his sole heir. He had given me over eight hundred thousand dollars in varying amounts, urging me to follow in his footsteps and play the market, learning by experience. He offered me no advice and when I went to him overcome by chagrin at my losses, he only chuckled and gave me more. He was determined that I should become a hard-headed, mercenary financier, a gambler like himself.—I! I learned to follow the loathsome market reports sedulously and calculate my supposed losses to a penny, but I put away all that he gave me, waiting until I could realize my dream.—Doctor, my feet are growing numb, but there is no pain and my head is clear. I can move them still, however; they have not ceased to obey the dictate of my brain." He thrust one slim, slippered foot forward over the dry rushes and regarded it with impersonal interest. Dennis shivered and the constable's beard stirred with the quivering of his chin.

"What was this dream of yours, Mr. Talmadge?"

"A home abroad—a palace of æsthetic splendor, graced

with masterpieces of the ages! There I could paint and gather about me the rarest souls of the artistic world at their creative best; other painters, sculptors, poets, actors. It would have been a salon of genius, of great endeavor and achievement, of undying renown! I did not delude myself with the idea that I might become famous; I would have been content to remain a pigmy among giants if I could have but lived in that dynamic atmosphere. I would have been their host, their familiar, in tune with their colossal aspirations. It was intoxicating, stupendous, eh? It would have taken more millions even than I thought my uncle possessed, but his fortune would be the nucleus and I would find other kindred souls! The old man would not die, though, and he was growing more impossible every day. What was a mere wisp of dried-up humanity, a shred of skin drawn over crumbling bones, to stand between me and my dream!—I can no longer move my feet, Doctor. They are like stone and the numbness is creeping up to my knees. It is cold!"

The lightning was playing in vivid sword-thrusts at the window now, and the thunder roared and rumbled like the crash of battle.

"If you ain't fooling us, Talmadge, you're making murderers of us!" Doctor Allen cried out. "You can't expect us to sit here helpless, tied hand and foot, and watch a man die!"

"I did, and I was not helpless." Talmadge smiled. "When I made up my mind that the old man must go, I began to study his physician. He was young, clever,

mercenary and unscrupulous, slavishly devoted to a voluptuous, luxury-loving wife, more money-mad than he. I approached him at last and the deal was made, but he broke one of the conditions of the agreement later, when the moment of his exposure came, by confiding in his wife. From that hour the woman has dogged me; I have never been free from her importunities, her clutching, reaching fingers, her cry: 'Give! Give!' My dream was shattered, my life in her hands, my soul in bondage!"

The wind rose in a whistling shriek and the dog cried softly at the door while the flame of the lamp flared up in an unseen draught and then died.

Talmadge shuddered again. His face was ghastly and the tips of the long, slender, tapering fingers that clutched the arms of his chair were turning blue, but he held himself erect.

"I must hurry," he murmured. "You know the terms of my uncle's will, the dwindling of his fortune; you can fathom the bitter disappointment which came to me? It had been part of my arrangement with Walsinger that in the event of his crime being discovered his wife was to be spirited away and kept in luxurious seclusion until he was free. I kept that part of the bargain until his death. Then she spread her wings like a noxious moth and fluttered to the spendthrift life which her knowledge of my secret forced me to provide the means of opening to her.—Doctor, my limbs are rigid, the cold is creeping up about my thighs and there are strange lights before my eyes."

Dennis groaned audibly and McCarty silenced him with a look.

"You had no intention of getting influence to try to free Walsinger after his conviction, had you, Mr. Talmadge?"

"Naturally not. He had served his turn, but it was necessary to keep him silent by repeated promises, to keep him hoping and believing, and it grew irksome. His death was a relief, but in all the five years that have passed since then the woman's demands have increased until now there is a bare pittance left; and I was weary of that shadow always at my elbow. It had been part of our arrangement that after her husband's death I would go to her at her command, but she was never to intrude her presence upon me. But when Mrs. Hatherly innocently enough asked me to dinner a fortnight ago to meet 'Mrs. Wall,' I realized that the crisis had come. The woman had recently made demands upon me which I could not meet and for the first time I ignored her summons. I declined the invitation and waited, meaning to defy her, to put an end, one way or another, to a situation that had become intolerable."

The lightning was less vivid and the thunder rolled away in the distance, but rain was sweeping in great gusts against the windows and the wind soughed in the trees.

"It is growing dark." Talmadge raised one hand slowly, waveringly to his eyes; then it fell limply once more upon the arm of his chair. "Your faces are dim. The time is short, now! Last Monday I was reading

here in this room with Lisa at my feet when the squall broke and all at once the dog rose growling and bristling. Some one came softly up on the porch, a hand fumbled with the latch, the door opened, it was she! In a few short, terse sentences she reiterated her demand and even as she spoke I realized the futility of defiance. I was desperate; a plan sprang full-fledged into my mind and with it a picture of that deserted cabin out there!

"I knew that she must have come here in secret, and my old servant was away but might return at any moment. My unwelcome visitor would not have been tricked into accompanying me to that cabin but there was another way and the storm would aid me, for no one would be apt to be abroad in that howling gale.—It takes long to tell it but it all happened in a few moments. Do you see those great brass candlesticks on the mantel? I temporized with the woman, waited until I caught her off her guard and then I struck! I had never lifted my hand in violence before but she went down like a log, and after an instant in which I stood, stunned, myself, at the irrevocable step I had taken, I worked with feverish haste.

"I tore off my dressing-gown, flung it into that closet and locked Lisa in there with a stern command to be silent; she has been trained to perfect obedience and I knew she would not stir, no matter what she heard. Then I put on a heavy ulster, extinguished the light and picked up my senseless burden—the burden which I had borne in spirit for these interminable years!

"It was dark outside, a darkness that was impenetrable

but I could feel my way, I knew every inch of the path. There was no sound but the roar of wind and water, no movement about me but the trees and shrubbery twisting before the blast. The woman's body was heavier than I thought and I had taken it up clumsily. One of her arms was swinging, dangling, the hand almost trailing on the ground, but I staggered down to the terrace steps leading to the beach.

"The tide was high, yet still coming in, and I knew it would obliterate my footsteps for all time, but that journey seemed never-ending. Once I stumbled over a half-buried log of driftwood and almost fell, but I caught myself up and plowed on, the weight in my arms growing heavier and heavier. I skirted the edge of the marsh and as it curved outward sharply I knew that I was nearing the cabin. I broke into a staggering run then, plunging through the loose sand and at last—at last I reached the door!

"It was open, banging in the wind, and I crossed the threshold, eased my burden to the floor and turned to fumble for the lantern which I had left there full of oil two days before. The rain and stinging salt wind must have revived the woman, for when I had lighted the lantern and turned again she was struggling to rise, gazing about her in a bewildered fashion. I sprang to the door, closed it, and with my back against it I told her what my slavery had meant throughout those years but that the end had come; death should free me from her!—Death! I am a dead man now myself, Doctor; that numb rigidity holds me in a vise from my waist

down and only—only my heart still beats and my brain lives!"

His voice had grown weaker, higher, and McCarty commanded hoarsely:

"Go on!"

"What need? She read my purpose in my eyes and for the first time I saw fear in her own. A babbling shriek rose to her lips as I advanced upon her, but after that I think she fought in desperate silence—I think, because there was a tumultous roaring in my ears and a lurid haze arose before me, obscuring everything except her form, and my brain was on fire. I was not conscious that I had seized the boat-hook and struck once again, until she dropped limply before me. Then the haze slowly cleared and I saw her gasp once or twice, and her great brown eyes opened, became fixed, staring into my own!

"At that moment the door blew open and as I dropped the boat-hook and staggered towards it, the lantern flickered and went out. My own salient thought was to rush from that hideous presence, that loathsome thing which living flesh had all at once become, but when I reached the doorway and looked toward my house I saw a light in the rear. My old servant had returned, I must wait until she retired! I closed the door and crouched within, wondering if those dead eyes could pierce the darkness, if that awful, scarlet stain were creeping toward me! I—I don't know how long that dreadful vigil lasted but it seemed countless hours. I was like a man half-drugged. A lethargy stole over me with the reaction from my fury,

and I must have gone a little mad, for her living hold upon me, her domination, had strengthened, not relaxed! I could feel the bonds tightening, the weight settling heavier than before, and the conviction came to me that I had not freed myself, after all; I had only fastened her shackles upon my spirit forever!

"At last there came a rumble of thunder, the first faint streak of lightning, and with it my brain cleared like magic and I knew what must be done. I found the lantern, relighted it after pouring a little oil from it into an old can, whittled shavings, strewed them upon the floor, poured the oil upon them and was about to touch a match to it when I remembered the door. There were some nails in a keg beside it, thick pieces of seasoned driftwood were heaped near the stove and a stone, worn smooth by ages in the water, held down a pile of yellowed newspapers on a shelf. I dropped a handful of nails in my coat pocket together with the stone, tucked two pieces of wood under my arm and lighted my trail of fire.

"All the time I had avoided that motionless figure lying there, but I was conscious that the fixed gaze of those glassy eyes had followed my every move, was following me then, as I extinguished the lantern and sprang for the door. The little spurt of flame had begun to hiss and crackle and a spiral of thin, pungent smoke arose, but it was not that which stifled me, it was the mounting horror overwhelming me at last.

"The storm had burst in all its fury and the rain slashed down like flailing whips as I hammered those wooden

bars across the door. The sound of my strokes was lost in the crash and roll of thunder, but as I drove the last nail it seemed to me that something moved within the cabin! I fancied I heard a dull thud and a crash, as of glass. Had the dead awakened?"

Talmadge's eyes had opened wide, were staring straight before him, and his rigid body was drawn up, moving slowly forward in his chair. The wind swirled, wailing down the chimney, and in the ghastly flickering red glow, beads of sweat stood out like drops of blood upon his brow. His listeners sat as though turned to stone and even McCarty held his breath as the graying lips moved once more.

"I flung the stone into the Sound and plunged madly back towards my house which was in darkness now. I do not know how I reached it, for I was beyond a conscious sense of direction, but the flashes of lightning guided me, and once up the path and inside my door, I moved calmly, rationally. I released Lisa, caught up my dressing-gown and went to my room. I do not think sleep came to me; it was a sort of coma in which the woman came and sat at my side. She has never left me since, sleeping or waking! She walked beside me when I went to find you, Doctor, at the jail the next morning; she clung to me when I talked with the man Doe in my garden the following day; she was close at hand this afternoon when again he came! I saw her face ever before me!"

The rigid body relaxed and he settled back inertly in his chair, his head falling upon his breast, and only the

labored, hoarse breathing told that he still lived. Doctor Allen started to rise but the dog's soft, appealing whine came from the other side of the door and at the longing cry, Talmadge lifted his head.

"I can—no longer see you, even—*her* face has faded but—she is here still, I can feel—her presence. Soon—soon I shall be free from it—forever! I told her that—there in the cabin. Whatever—I have done, I—have paid for. Something—is clutching at my heart and—I cannot lift my hands to—tear it away!—The cold is creeping—creeping up! But where is she?—She has gone—gone!"

His breast heaved convulsively, then was still, and his eyes closed as the head fell forward once more. The wind moaned, dying away, and from beneath the door came Lisa's whimpering wail.

McCarty rose heavily.

"Doctor, Denny and me will be getting away now; the rest is up to you and the constable here. The case is finished, you've got the murderer of Mrs. Wall."

Constable Bartlett shook his head solemnly.

"Ye hain't got no ways o' shacklin' a sperit, ner handcuffin' a ghost, ner puttin' a soul in prison. We got the shell o' Paul Talmadge but his soul is free at last!"

CHAPTER XXIV

TIMOTHY MC CARTY, ESQ.

THE sun beamed down graciously upon the smiling, tranquil countryside and a cool, salt, refreshing breeze blew in their faces as the doctor's rattle-trap car with his own rotund body squeezed in behind the wheel, McCarty beside him and Dennis clinging to the running-board, bowled along the highroad towards Plimptonport. Every available space on the little car was piled with luggage, for the two vacation-seekers were going home.

"I mind," Dennis broke the silence, speaking with the utter disregard of absorbed introspection, "I mind that when Mac and me was chugging along in that tub of a dory before the engine died on us, he said to me: 'As long as there are men and women in the world there'll be love, good or bad, and the desire for more than they can gain rightfully, and the fear of what they've done or what somebody's got on them, and when there's no other way out they'll turn to crime.' True for him, and though he's——"

"Denny Riordan, you'll oblige me by not recalling what we said in that boat!" McCarty interrupted sternly. "If you'd keep your tongue to yourself and your eyes

and hands on your job we'd never have been washed up on the shore!"

"And we'd never have found out who killed Mrs. Wall!" the doctor interjected. "Her swollen hand and the irritation of the skin didn't appear to me to be anything but a bruise from her struggle with the murderer; and even the autopsy didn't show that the abrasion on the back of her head was caused, as it must have been, by the blow of the candlestick. I calc'lated she'd struck it in falling!"

"We were the lot of us blind as bats," McCarty remarked. "I ought to have guessed from the first, for Talmadge's house was the only one near and I knew from the shoes of her she'd never walked to the cabin but been carried there, though I thought 'twas from up back, somewhere. Then Mrs. Hatherly told us that Mrs. Lowden had not been able to come to dinner because she'd got ivy poisoning, and Talmadge told me yesterday that a few days before that dinner was given, Mrs. Lowden and her husband had come to tea with him to look at his pictures. I didn't get the connection, though the dead woman's hand had puzzled me since I first laid eyes on it, and 'twas only when my own began to swell and itch and burn like the devil and all, and you told me what ailed it, that I remembered dropping my match in among the leaves of that shiny, low-growing plant bordering the walk down from Talmadge's house, and the truth came to me!"

"You told me in Dalesboro that this was not a case where a body could look ahead, that you'd have to feel

your way, and feel it you did, Mac!" Dennis glanced down at the bandaged hand on his friend's knee. "'Tis strange that poison, of one sort or another, has followed this case from start to finish; it was the beginning of Talmadge's downfall, and the end of it!"

McCarty shook his head ruefully as the highroad merged into a quaint, narrow, cobbled street and the weather-beaten houses of Plimptonport crowded about them.

"When I talked to Talmadge on Wednesday I thought it was queer he was so anxious to tell me in every detail what he had done on the evening of the murder and how he spent every minute, when I'd not so much as asked. He made another crack, too, just before I left, that ought to have put me wise, when he raved about his garden and how peaceful and contented he was, and with his next breath said he was going away for good and all. 'Twas the natural instinct of the guilt inside him, to start the ball rolling for his getaway, but he pulled it too soon and on the first one who would listen to him. That's the oldest mistake in the world for a crook to make and anybody that's had experience——" He checked himself and added hurriedly: "There's some credit to any of us in this but just bull luck that I put my hand on that deceitful, shiny little plant and it stung me!"

"Speaking of bull luck," Dennis' introspective mood was still upon him, "will you remember, Mac, that Nor— we were told about Mrs. Wall's gambling that she never lost until she bulled her luck too far? 'Twas what she did the night of the storm and it turned on her, wiping

her out. Talmadge spoke truth, I'm thinking. She must have rode him hard and long and whatever he'd done, he paid for."

They pulled up beside the platform of the little station just as the way-train chugged noisily in, and, while Dennis scrambled about collecting their impedimenta, McCarty held out his hand.

"Good-by, Doctor. 'Twas a pleasure you gave us, letting us work in with you, and if ever you come to New York——!"

He stopped, remembering his incognito, but Doctor Allen shook his head gravely.

"I'll never get there. I'd like it, but folks for miles around depend on me to bring 'em into the world and ease their way out of it, stopping what pain and suffering I can in between, and until my own time comes my place is back there, to the Cove. But mebbe you'll come again sometime?" His kindly voice rang with wistful sincerity. "Barnstable's got to take a back seat now, and by the time Eb Bartlett gets through lording it over the sheriff he'll begin to think he found the truth out himself and landed the murderer. But it was you did it all. I won't forget you and I hope you'll come out our way the next time you take a vacation."

They wrung his plump hand and hurried to their train, craning their necks through the window, as they moved off, for a last glimpse of his friendly, benign countenance. Then, as they settled in their seats, Dennis glanced upward at the paraphernalia overflowing the rack above their heads, and remarked:

"A vacation, the good little man called it? 'Twas a fine fishing trip for you, Mac Doe, with luck coming your way and wind and tide running free!"

"It was a bigger fish we caught than ever we expected, Denny, and that's no lie, but I'm Mac Doe no longer, thanks be! You'll go back to fighting fires and me squabbling with my tenants like the private citizen and landed proprietor that I am, no less! Timothy McCarty, again!" He sighed with deep content. "Timothy McCarty, Esquire, of New York!"

THE END